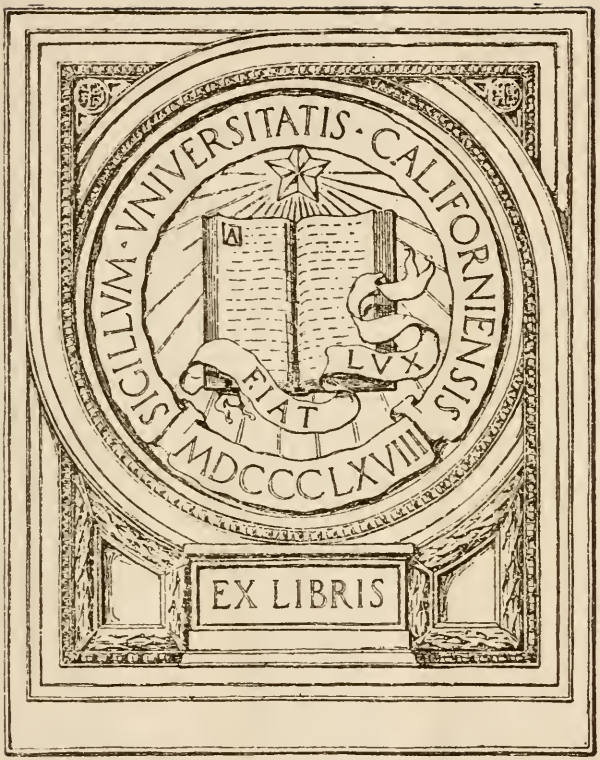
The MERCY of the LORD

FLORA ANNIE STEEL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The Mercy of the Lord

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UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

By

Flora Annie Steel

Author of

'On the Face of the Waters,' 'A Sovereign Remedy,' etc.

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THE MERCY OF THE LORD

"God movesn-a-mystere'rus way
Iswon-derstuper-form."

Craddock was polishing the brass of his safety valve and singing the while at high pressure between set teeth: his choice of a ditty determined by one of his transitory lapses into conventional righteousness. The cause of which in the present instance being an equally transient admiration for a good little Eurasian girl fresh from her convent.

As the sun—which shines equally on the just and the unjust—flamed on his red face and glowed from his corn-coloured beard it seemed to me—waiting in the comparative coolth of the pointsman's mud-oven shelter till the one mail train of the day should appear and disappear, leaving the ribbon of rail which spanned the desert world to its horizon free for our passaging—that both he and his engine radiated heat: that they gave out—as the burning bush or the flaming swords of the paradise-protectors must have given out—a message of fiery warning that suited the words he sang:

"Eplants 'isfootsteps-inthesea."

Craddock punctuated the rhythm with an appropriate stop of shrill steam which ought to have startled me: but it did not, because my outward senses had suddenly become slaves to my memory. The desert was a garden full of cool fragrance which comes with the close of an Indian day, and the only sound to be heard in it was a glad young voice repeating these words:

"Oh! God of the Battle! Have mercy! Have mercy! Have mercy!"

"Bravo! young Bertram!" said someone—even those who scarcely knew whether Bertram were his Christian or his surname called him that—"Easy to see you're fresh from the Higher Standard."

Young Bertram smiled down on us from the plinth of the marble steps leading up to the marble summer house which stood in the centre of this Garden-of-Dead-Kings.

Posed there on his pedestal, holding orb-like in his raised right hand the battered bronze cannon ball whose inscription—roughly lettered in snaky spirals—he had just translated, young Bertram reminded me of the young Apollo.

"You bet," he answered, gaily. "But what does it mean, here on this blessed ball? Who knows the story?—for there is one, of course."

The company looked at me, partly because as a civilian such knowledge was expected of me; mostly because I was responsible for the invasion of this peaceful Eastern spot by a restless, curious horde of Westerns; my only excuse for the desecration being, that as the most despicable product of our Indian rule, a grass widower bound to entertain, I had naturally clutched at the novelty of a picnic supper and dance some few miles out of the station.

Perhaps, had I seen the garden first, I might have relented, but I took it on trust from my orderly, who assured me it held all things necessary for my salvation, including a marble floor on which a drugget could be stretched.

It held much more. There was in it an atmosphere—not all orange blossom and roses, though these drugged the senses—which to my mind made a touch of tragedy lurk even in our laughter.

Though, in sooth, we brought part of the tragedy with us: for a frontier war was on, and all the men and half the women present, knew that the route might come any moment.

Some few—I, as chief district officer, the colonel and his adjutant—were aware that it probably would come before morning: but ours were not the sober faces. Our plans were laid; all things, even the arrangements for the women and the children and the unfit-for-service, were cut and dried: but the certainty that someone must—as the phrase runs—take over documents, and the uncertainty as to who the unlucky beggar would be, lent care to a young heart or two.

Not, however, to young Bertram. As he stood questioning me with his frank blue eyes, even the white garments he had donned (because, he said, "It might be a beastly time before he wore decent togs again") told the

same tale as his glad voice—the tale of that boundless hope which holds ever the greatest tragedy of life.

"Who is that pretty boy?" said a low soft voice at my elbow.

I did not answer the spoken question of the voice, but as I replied to the unspoken question of many eyes I was conscious that of all the many incongruous elements I had imported into that Eastern garden this Western woman who had appraised young Bertram's beauty was the most incongruous. It was not the Paris frock and hat, purchased on the way out—she had only rejoined her husband the day before—which made her so. It was the woman inside them. I knew the type so well, and my soul rose in revolt that she should soil his youth with her approval.

"I've no doubt there are stories," I replied; "but I don't happen to know them. I'm as much a stranger here as you all are. So come! let us look round till it's dark enough to dance."

"Dark enough to sit out, he means," said someone to the Paris frock and hat, whereat there was a laugh, but not so general and not half so hearty as the one which greeted young Bertram's gravity as he replaced the cannon ball on the plinth with the profound remark:

"Something about a woman, you bet."

"Do introduce me!" pleaded the Paris frock and hat as the lad came down, bearing the brunt of chaff gallantly; but I pretended not to hear, though I knew such diplomacy was vain with women of her type—women whose refinement makes them shameless.

Yes! she was a strange anomaly in that garden, though, Heaven knows, it appealed frankly enough to the senses. So frankly that it absorbed even such meretricious Western additions as cosy corners and iced champagne—on tables laid for two—without encroaching a hair's-breadth on the inviolable spiritual kingdom of the ivory orange blossom, the silver jasmine stars, even the red hearts of the roses.

They were lighting up the lines of the cressets about the dancing floor when we began to reassemble, and as each star of light quivered into being, the misty unreal radiance grew

around the fretted marble of the summer house until arch and pilaster seemed to lose solidity, and the whole building, leaving its body behind in shining sleep, found freedom as a palace of dreams.

And there, as a foreground to its mystical beauty, was young Bertram dangling his long legs from the pedestal and nursing the battered old bronze ball on his lap as if it had been a baby

"I've found out all about it," he said, cheerfully. "That chap"—he pointed to a figure below him—"told me a splendid yarn, and if you like,"—he turned to me—"as they haven't done lighting up yet, and we can't dance till they finish, he could tell it again. I could translate, you know, for those who can't understand."

The innocent pride made me smile, until the Paris frock said, "*I* shall be so grateful if you will, Mr. Bertram," in a tone of soft friendliness which proclaimed her success and my failure. Both, however, I recognised were inevitable when I remembered that she was the wife of the lad's captain, a silent, bullet-headed Briton of whom he chose to make a hero—as boys will of older men who are not worthy to unlatch their shoes.

The figure rose and salaamed. It was that of a professional snake charmer, who had evidently come in hopes of being allowed to exhibit his skill: for his flat basket of snakes, slung to a bambu yoke, lay beside him.

"And it *was* about a woman, as I said," continued young Bertram, with the same innocent pride. "She was of his tribe—the snaky tribe, and so, of course, he knows about it all."

I had my doubts—the man looked a cunning scoundrel—but there was an awkward five minutes to fill up, so chairs and cushions were requisitioned, and on them and the marble steps we circled round to listen: the Paris dress, I noticed, choosing the latter, close to the translator.

He performed his task admirably, catching not only the meaning of the words but the rhythm of the snake charmer's voice, and so quickly, too, that the message for the East, and for the West, seemed one; yet it seemed to come from neither of the speakers.

"'Oh, God of the Battle! have mercy, have mercy, have mercy!' Such was her prayer to the Bright One, and this is the tale of it:

"Straight was her soul as the saraph who tempted Eve-mother, but crooked her body as snakes that deal death in the darkness—crookt in her childhood—crookt in the siege of the town by a spent shot which struck her, asleep in her cradle (the ball that you nurse on your knee, sahib—they found it beside her—her crushed limbs caressing the foe that destroyed her).

"She grew in this garden, a cripple, but fair still of face, and twice cursed in such gifts of beauty all barren and bitter—so bitter she veiled it away, hiding loveliness, hatefulness, both, from the eyes of the others: a soul stricken sore ere the battle began, yet insatiate of life, insatiate of blessing and cursing, insatiate of power. And, look you! she gained it! Most strangely, for fluttering through thickets like birds that are wounded and dragging herself like a snake to the blossoms, she threaded the jasmine to necklets and pressed out the roses to perfume, so giving to women uncrippled love-lures for the fathers of sons.

"Hid in the jasmine and screened by the trails of the roses, here, on this spot stood her chamber of charm for the secret distilling of *itr*, the silent repeating of ritual, the murmur of musical *mantras*.

"And none dare to enter since Death lurked unseen in the thickets, and serpents, her kinsmen, slid swift to the threshold to guard it, and watched with still eyes her command.

"'It was witchcraft,' they said, with a shudder, those fortunate women, yet came in the dusk for her charms!

"But she gave them not always, for years brought her wisdom. She learnt the love lore of the flowers, the close starry heart of the jasmine, the open red heart of the rose, told their dream of fair death through the ripening of seed, and her voice would grow bitter with scorn. . . .

"'Go! find your own lures for your lovers—I work for the seed—for the harvest of men.'

"High perched on the wall of the city the balcony women waxed wroth. It was money to them till the cripple who fought them with flowers prevailed in the battle for life to the world.

"And Narghiza, the chief of them all, felt her youth on the wane. . . .

"So, one night in the darkness, ere dawning, men crept to the garden where only the women might enter. Men, heated by wine and by lust, inflamed by the balcony lies—yea! the witch who wrought evil to all—who had killed Gulanâr in her prime by a wasting—whose frown was a curse, must be reckoned with, killed, and her devilish chamber destroyed.

"But the sound of the rustling leaves as the snakes slid soft in the darkness made even the wine bibbers think, so that secret and soft as the snakes in the thickets they crept back to safety; till there—in the darkness, the fragrance of flowers, but one man remained, a man who grew old! Beautiful, tired of the life he had squandered, and reckless, yet angered because of the girl who had wasted to death—a girl he had paid for.

"'Cowards!' he said with a smile, and crept on in the dark. A rustle, but not of a snake! In the leaves a faint glimmer of white, and a voice—such a beautiful voice!

"'In this garden of women what seek you, my lord?'

"'I seek *you*, for your death.' But as swift as his hand with the dagger, around him there rose in a shimmering shelter the wide-hooded curves of the serpents, their still, watchful eyes giving out a cold gleaming that shone like a halo about her.

"'What harm have I done?' Such a beautiful voice! 'Come and see, if you will.'

"On his head fell the spent leaves of roses, the frail stars of jasmine were hers as she dragged herself on, and he followed through darkness and fragrance and flowers. The serpents lay thick on the threshold; she stayed them with this:

"'Wait, friends, till he touches me.'

"Opened the door and said scornfully:

"'There stands my charm.'

"The dim light of the cresset showed emptiness save for yon ball with its legend ('tis scratched, as you see, in the shape of a snake, sahib). She read it aloud, and then turned to him:

"'Yea! that is all! I appeal to the God of the Battle of Life, and I call unto Him to have mercy, have mercy, have mercy—What mercy He chooses——'

"Her voice sank to silence. The cresset's dim light showed the folds of her veiling to him, and to her showed his beauty of face as he knelt to her crippledom.

"'Mercy!'—his voice was a whisper—'have mercy—the charm lies within—let me see it. . . .'

"His hand sought the folds of her veil and, responsive, the shelter of snakes rose about her.

"'Wait, friends, till he touches me!'

"Swift, with quick fear in it, came the stern warning, and then there was silence.

"Oh! beautiful night with spent stars of the jasmine, spent leaves of the roses, spent life nigh to death 'mid its darkness, its fragrance.

"Oh! beautiful face, free of veiling with spent stars of eyes and spent rose leaves of lips.

"'My beloved!'

"Like a sigh came the whisper, and slowly as stars in the evening their eyes grew to brightness, and closer and closer their lips grew to kisses.

"'*Wait, friends, till he touches me.*'

"That was her order, and swift to the second, the snakes struck between them.

"Oh, beautiful death by the kiss of a lover! Oh, merciful poison of passion."

The sing-song ceased, and, as if to take its place, the first notes of the *Liebestraum* waltz sounded from the rose and jasmine thicket in which the band had been concealed.

"That's a mercy of the Lord, anyhow," laughed some young Philistine. "I thought they'd never stop, or the band begin!"

In a moment the listening circle had changed into an eager hurrying of couples towards the dancing floor.

But young Bertram still sat on the pilaster nursing the old bronze ball, his glad young face strangely sober.

"I think this is our dance," said the Paris frock, in a voice of icy allurement which positively rasped my nerves.

Young Bertram sprang to the ground hastily.

"I beg your pardon! By George, what's that?"

He had upset one of the snake charmer's flat baskets, and there was a general stampede as the occupants slid out.

"Don't be alarmed," I cried, "they always have their fangs drawn, and he will get them back in a moment."

Even as I spoke the hollow quavering of the charmer's gourd flute began, and three snakes stayed their flight to sit up on their tails and sway drowsily to the rhythm.

"There was a fourth one, wasn't there?" said young Bertram. "It slipped our way, didn't it?"

He spoke to the Paris frock, which had taken refuge on the opposite pilaster, so that the whole expanse of the wide marble steps now lay between them.

"Huzoor, no!" interrupted the owner of the snakes, hastily, "there were but three—there could only have been three—for see! my serpents obey me."

He was slipping the brutes back to prison again as he spoke, but I noticed his eyes were restless.

"Are you quite sure?" I asked.

He gave me a furtive glance, then carelessly held up a loathsome five-footer. "Cobras like these are very easily counted, Huzoor; besides, as the Presence said, they are all fangless."

The one whose jaws he as carelessly prized open certainly was, and I should have dismissed doubt had not young Bertram at that moment taken up the flute gourd, and with the gay remark, "Let me have a shot at it," commenced—out of fastidiousness as to the mouthpiece, no doubt—to blow into it upside down.

I never saw fear better expressed in any face than on the snake charmer's when he heard the indescribable sound which echoed out into the garden. It grew green as without the least ceremony he snatched the instrument away.

"The Presence must not do that—the snakes do not like strangers."

Young Bertram laughed, "Nor the noise, I expect! The beastly thing makes a worse row wrong side up than right—doesn't it?"

What the Paris frock replied I do not know, as they were already hurrying up to make the most of the remaining dance.

Not that there was any necessity for hurry to judge by the number of times I saw his white raiment and her fancy frills floating round together during the next hour or so.

The Adjutant—a man I particularly disliked (possibly because he seemed to me the antithesis of young Bertram)—remarked on it also when he found me out seeking solitude in one of the latticed minarets.

"Going it!" he said, cynically. "He won't be quite such a young fool when he comes down from the hills."

I turned on him in absolute dismay. "The hills? but surely you're going on service?"

The Adjutant shrugged his shoulders. "Someone has to take over, and he'll soon console himself."

I felt I could have kicked him, and was glad that the "Roast Beef" called me to my duties as host.

They had laid the supper table where we had listened to the snake charmer's chant; somehow through all the laughter I seemed to hear that refrain going on: "Oh! God of the Battle! have mercy! have mercy! have mercy!"

What mercy would she show him? None. And what chance would he have in an atmosphere like that of Semoorie? None. Even the husband, whom rumour said was bullet-headed to some purpose, would be away.

We were very merry in spite, or perhaps because of, an insistent trend of thought towards impending change, and I was just about to propose the health of my guests with due discreet allusion to the still doubtful future when it was settled by the appearance of a telegraph peon.

In the instant hush which followed, I observed irrelevantly that our brief feasting had made a horrid mess of what not half an hour before had seemed food for the gods!

Then the Colonel looked up with a grim conscious smile which fitted ill with the fragrant lantern-lit garden behind him.

"The route has come, gentlemen, we start to-morrow at noon."

He checked a quick start to their feet on the part of some of the youngsters by addressing himself to me:

"But as everything has been cut and dry for some days we needn't spoil sport yet awhile. There's time for a dance or two."

"In that case I'll go on," I replied, "and with greater will than ever."

Somehow it never struck me what was likely to happen, seeing that young Bertram was junior subaltern and in addition the pride of his fellows, until I heard the calls for "our speaker" to return thanks. He had been sitting, of course, next to the Paris frock, and beside him had been the Adjutant, looking, I had noticed, as if he thought he ought to be in young Bertram's place. I wish to God he had been.

They both rose at the same moment; the Adjutant to work, no doubt—for, pushing his chair back, he left the table; young Bertram to his task of responding.

I saw at once that he knew his fate. I think he had that instant been told of it by the Adjutant: and perhaps in a way it was wiser and kinder to tell him before—so to speak—he gave himself away.

He stood for an appreciable time as if dazed, then pulling himself together, spoke steadily, if a trifle artificially.

"Mr. Commissioner, Ladies, and Gentlemen! I thought a minute ago that I was the last person to return thanks for our host's regrets and good wishes. I know now that I am really the only person in the regiment who could do it honestly; because I am the only person who can sympathise with him thoroughly—who can, like he does, regret the regiment's departure, and—and at the same time give it God-speed, while I—I——"

He paused, and suddenly the strenuous effort after conventional banalities left his young face free to show its grief—almost its anger.

"It's no use my trying to talk bosh," he broke out, and swept away by realities: "As you know, I'd give everything not to say God-speed, but I suppose I must."

And then a sudden remembrance seemed to come to him, he turned in swift impulse, his face alight, leapt to the pedestal behind him, and there he was again with that blessed battered old ball in his raised right hand.

"And I don't think I can do it better than this does it. This——" his voice had the notes of life's divine tragedy of hope in it—"fits us all—fits everything!—And so," his eyes sought mine, "we thank you, sir, for all and everything, and wish that the God of the Battle may have mercy all round."

For a second he stood there, almost triumphant, beautiful as a god, below him the guttering candles and disorder of the supper table, above him the stars of heaven: then, with a light laugh, he was calling for the band to begin and heading the hurried return to the dancing floor.

As he passed me, gallant and gay, I heard the Paris frock quote in a consoling whisper, "They also serve who only stand and wait."

The grateful admiration of his eyes told the delicacy of her art. I realised this again when shortly after I had an opportunity for one word of consolation also.

"She said that, too," he replied, his voice trembling a little. "She's been awfully good to me, you know—but so you all are—and I daresay it is all right."

I knew that to be impossible, but I resolved to do my level best to protect him.

Then my duties claimed me. Despite the Colonel's coolness, the party began to drift away to preparations, their measure of responsibility shown by the order of their going, until only a dozen or so of lighthearted youngsters were left for another and yet another waltz, the prime instigator of delay being, of course, young Bertram.

I never saw the lad look better. An almost reckless vitality seemed to radiate from and invade the still scented peace of the whole garden.

I found myself trying to evade it by wandering off to the furthest, stillest corner, where I could smoke in peace till called on finally to say good-night—or good-morning—to my guests.

I must have fallen asleep in one of the latticed minarets,

and slept long, for when I woke a grey radiance was in the sky that showed above the scented orange trees. Dawn was breaking, the garden held no sound save a faint rustle as of leaves. And not a sign remained of Western intrusion. The swiftness of Indian service had taken away as it had brought. As I made my way to where we had danced and supped, the immediate past seemed a dream, and I strained my eyes into the starred shadows of the jasmine thicket half expecting to see a white veil creeping like a snake.

What was that? I had no time to find fancy or fact—my eyes had caught sight of something unmistakable at the foot of the marble pedestal.

It was young Bertram.

He was lying as if asleep, his cheek caressing the battered bronze ball that he had encircled with his arms.

His face turned up to the stars showed nothing but content.

* * * * *

He must have stayed on after the others had gone, probably to think things out—the legend of appeal must have drawn him back to the very spot where the snake charmer's basket had been upset—like it had to me, the fragrant peace must have brought to his weariness sleep.

For the rest. Had there really been a fourth snake? Was it true that serpents always revenged themselves for wrong charming? Or were those two faint blood spots on the rose leaves of young Bertram's lips . . . .

* * * * *

"An 'E' willmakeit-plain."

Craddock's rolling baritone mingled with a shriek of steam welcoming a swift speck on the horizon.

With a roar and a rush it was on us, past us.

"Ef that 'ymn 'ad bin wrote these times, sir," remarked Craddock blandly, as he turned on steam, "the h'author might 'ave put in a H'engin. There ain't anythin' more mysterious in its goin's on—except per'aps wimmen. I'd ruther trust for grace to the mercy o' the Lord than to them any day."

SALT DUTY

I

"Lo! nigh on fifty years have passed since that dark night; just such a night as this, O! Children-of-the-Master! and yet remembering the sudden yell of death which rose upon the still air—just such an air as this, hot and still. . . . Nay! fear not, Children-of-the-Master! since I, Imân (the faithful one so named and natured), watch, as I watched then . . . and yet, I say, the hair upon my head which then grew thick and now is bald, the down upon my skin which then was bloom and now is stubble, starts up even as I started to my feet at that dread cry, and catching Sonny-*baba* in my arms fled to the safer shadows of the garden. And the child slept. . . ."

The voice, declamatory yet monotonous, paused as if the speaker listened.

"It is always so with the Master-Children," it went on, tentatively, "they sleep. . . ."

The second and longer pause which ensued allowed soft breathings to be heard from the darkness, even, unmistakable, and when the voice continued something of the vainglorious tone of the *raconteur* had been replaced by a note of resignation.

"And wherefore not, my friends, seeing that as masters they know no fear?"

Wherefore, indeed?

Imân Khân, whilom major-domo to many sahibs of high degree, now in his old age factotum to the Eurasian widow and children of a conservancy overseer, asked himself the question boldly. Yet the heart which beat beneath the coarse white muslin coatee starched to crackle-point in the effort to conceal the poorness of its quality, felt a vague dissatisfaction.

In God's truth the memory of the great Mutiny still sent his old blood shivering through his veins, and some of the tribe of black-and-tan boys who slept around him

in the darkness were surely now old enough to thrill, helplessly responsive, to the triumphal threnody of their race?

Yet it was not so. The tale, on the contrary, was a sure sleep-compeller; indeed, he was never able to reach his own particular contribution to the sum total of heroism before sleep came—except in his own dreams! *There* he remembered, as he remembered so many things. How to decorate a ham, for instance—though it was an abomination to the Lord!—how to ice champagne—though that also was damnable!—when to say "Not at home," or dismiss a guest by announcing the carriage—though these were foreign to him, soul and body.

Out there, beyond the skimp verandah, amid the native cots set in the dusky darkness in hopes of a breath of fresher air, old Imân's imagination ran riot in etiquette.

And yet the faint white glimmer of the Grand Trunk Road which showed beyond the cots was not straighter, more unswerving than the *khânsâman's* creed as to the correct card to play in each and every circumstance of domestic life.

His present mistress, a worthy soul of the most doubtful Portuguese descent, knew this to her cost. It was a relief, in fact, for her to get away at times from his determination, for instance, to have what he called "sikkens" for dinner. But then she did not divide her world into the sheep who always had a savoury second course in their menu, and the goats who did not. To him it was the crux of social position.

So, an opportunity of escape having arisen in the mortal illness of a distant relation, she had gone off for a week's holiday full of tears and determination, while away, to eat as much sweet stuff as she chose, leaving Imân Khân in charge of the quaint little bastion of the half-ruined caravanserai in which she was allowed free quarters in addition to her pension.

He was relieved also. He had, in truth, a profound contempt for her; but as this was palpably the wrong game, he covered his disapproval with an inflexible respect which allowed no deviation from duty on either side. Yet it was a hard task to keep the household straight. Sometimes

even Imân's solid belief in custom as all-sufficing wavered, and he half regretted having refused the offers of easier services made him by rich natives anxious to ape the manner of the alien. But it was only for a moment. The claims of the white blood he had served all his life, as his forbears had before him, were paramount, and whatever his faults, the late *E-stink Sahib,* conservancy overseer, had been white—or nearly so! Did not his name prove it? Had not *Warm E-stink Sahib* (Warren Hastings) left a reputation behind him in India for all time? Yea! he had been a real master. The name was without equal in the land—save, perhaps, that which came from the great conqueror, *Jullunder* (Alexander).

Undoubtedly, *E-stink Sahib* had been white; so it was a pity the children took so much after their mother; more and more so, indeed, since the baby girl born after her father's death was the darkest of the batch. It was as if the white blood had run out in consequence of the constant calls upon it. For Elflida Norma, the eldest girl—they all had fine names except the black baby, whom that incompetent widow had called Lily—was . . . .

Ah! what was not Elflida Norma? The old man, drowsing in the darkness after a hard day of decorum, wandered off still more dreamily at the thought of his darling. *She* did not sleep out on the edge of the high road. Her sixteen years demanded other things. Ah! so many things. Yet the Incompetent one could perceive no difference between the claims of the real Miss-*Sahiba*—that is, *E-stink Sahib's* own daughter by a previous wife—and those of the girl-brat she herself had brought to him by a previous husband, and whom she had cheerfully married off to a black man with a sahib's hat! For this was Imân Khân's contemptuous classification of Xavier Castello, one of those unnecessarily dark Eurasians who even in the middle of the night are never to be seen without the huge pith hats, which they wear, apparently, as an effort at race distinction.

The Incompetent one was quite capable of carrying through a similar marriage for the Miss-*Sahiba.* Horrible thought to Imân; all the more horrible because he was

powerless to provide a proper husband. He could insist on savouries for dinner; he could say "the door is shut" to undesirable young men; he could go so far in weddings as to provide a *suffer* (supper) and a wedding cake (here his wrinkles set into a smile), but only God could produce the husband, especially here in this mere black-man's town where sahibs lived not. Where sahibs did not even seek a meal or a night's rest in these evil days when they were whisked hither and thither by rail trains instead of going decently by road.

Through the darkness his dim eyes sought the opposite bastion of the serai. In the olden days any moment might have brought someone. . . . .

But those days were past. It would need a miracle now to bring a sahib out of a post carriage to claim accommodation there. Yea! a real heaven-sent car must come.

Still, God was powerful. If he chose to send one, there might be a real wedding—such a wedding as—there had been—when—he . . . .

So, tired out, Imân was once more in his dreams decorating hams, icing champagne, and giving himself away in the intricacies of sugar-piping.

When he woke, it was with a sense that he had somehow neglected his duty. But no! In the hot dry darkness there was silence and sleep. Even Lily-*baba* had her due share of Horatio Menelaus' bed. He rose, and crept with noiseless bare feet to peep in through the screens of Elflida Norma's tiny scrap of a room that was tacked on to the one decent-sized circular apartment in the bastion, like a barnacle to a limpet. One glance, even by the dim light of the cotton wick set in a scum of oil floating on a tumbler of water, showed him that she was no longer where an hour or two before he had left her safe.

Without a pause he crept on across the room and looked through the door at its opposite end, which gave on the arcaded square of the serai.

All was still. Here and there among the ruined arches a twinkling light told of some wayfarer late come, and from the shadows a mixed bubbling of hookahs and camels could be heard drowsily.

She was not there, however, as he had found her sometimes, listening to a bard or wandering juggler; for she was not as the others, tame as cows, but rather as the birds, wild and flighty. So he passed on, out through the massive doorway, built by dead kings, and stood once more on the white gleam of the road, listening. From far down it, nearer the town, came the unmelodious hee-haw of a concertina played regardless of its keys.

"Hee, hee, haw! Haw, hee, hee!"

His old ear knew the rhythm. That was the dance in which the sahib-logue kicked and stamped and laughed. This was Julia Castello's doing. There was a "nautch" among the black people with the sahib's hats, and the Miss-*Sahiba*—his Miss-*Sahiba*—had been lured to it!

Once more, without a pause, the instinct as to the right thing to do coming to him with certainty, he turned aside to his cook-room, and, lighting a hurricane lantern, began to rummage in a battered tin box, which, bespattered still with such labels as "Wanted on the Voyage," proclaimed itself a perquisite from some past services.

So, ten minutes afterwards, a starched simulacrum of what had once been a Chief Commissioner's butler (even to a tarnished silver badge in the orthodox headgear shaped like a big pith quoit) appeared in the verandah of Mrs. Castello's house, and, pointing with dignity to the glimmer of a hurricane lantern in the dusty darkness by the gate, said, as he produced a moth-eaten cashmere opera-cloak trimmed with moulting swansdown:

"As per previous order, the Miss-Sahiba's ayah hath appeared for her mistress, with this slave as escort."

Elflida Norma, a dancing incarnation of pure mischief, looked round angrily on the burst of noisy laughter which followed, and the pausing stamp of her foot was not warranted by the polka.

"Why you laugh?" she cried, passionately. "He is my servant—he belongs to our place."

Then, turning to the deferential figure, her tone changed, and she drew herself up to the full of her small height.

"Nikul jao!" she said, superbly; which, being interpreted, is the opprobrious form of "get you gone."

The old man's instinct had told him aright. There, amid that company, the girl in the white muslin she had surreptitiously pinned into the semblance of a ball dress, her big blue eyes matching the tight string of big blue beads about her slender throat, showed herself apart absolutely, despite her dark hair and almost sallow complexion.

"The Huzoor has forgotten the time," said Imân, imperturbably; "it is just twelve o'clock, and *Sin-an-hella* dances of this description"—here he looked round at the squalid preparations for supper with superlative scorn—"always close at midnight."

There was something so almost appalling in the answering certainty of his tone regarding Cinderellas, that even Mrs. Castello hesitated, looking round helplessly at her guests.

"In addition," added the old man, following up the impression, "is not the night Saturday? and even in the great *Lat-Sahib's* house, where I have served, was there no nautch on Saturdays—excepting *Sin-an-hellas.*"

He yielded the last point graciously, but the concession was even more confounding to Mrs. Castello than his previous claim. Besides, old Imân's darkling allusion to service with a Governor-General was a well-known danger-signal to the whole Hastings family, including Elflida Norma, who now hesitated palpably.

"I t'ought you more wise," insinuated her partner, who had actually laid aside his hat for the polka, "than to have such a worn-out poor fellow to your place. Pay no heed to him, Miss 'Astin', and polk again once more."

Elflida drew herself away from his encircling arm haughtily.

"No, thanks," she drawled, her small head, with its short curls in air. "I am tired of polking—and he is a more better servant than your people have in your place, anyhow."

"But Elfie!" protested Mrs. Castello.

The girl interrupted her step-sister with an odd expression in her big blue eyes.

"It will be Sunday, as he says, Julia; besides, the princess always goes home first from a Cinderella, you know, because——"

"Because why?" inquired Mrs. Castello, fretfully; "that will be some bob-dash from the silly books she adores so much, Mr. Rosario."

Elflida stood for a moment smiling sweetly, as it were appraising all things she saw, from the greasy tablecloth on the supper table to old Imân's starched purity; from the cocoanut oil on the head of one admirer, to the tarnished silver sign of service on the head of the other.

"Because she was a princess, of course," she replied, demurely; and straightway stooped her white shoulders for the yoke of cashmere and swansdown with a dignity which froze even Mr. Rosario's remonstrance.

"Thank you," she said, loftily in the verandah, when he suggested escort; "but my ayah and my bearer are sufficient. Good-night."

So down the pathway, inches deep in dust, she walked sedately towards the glimmer of the lantern by the gate, followed deferentially by Imân. But only so far; for once within the spider's web halo round the barred light, she sprang forward with a laugh. The next instant all was dark. Cimmerian darkness indeed to the old man as he struggled with the moulting swansdown and moth-eaten cashmere she had flung over his head.

"Miss-*Sahiba*! Miss-*baba*! *norty*, *norty* girl!" he cried after her, desperately, in his double capacity of escort and ayah. Then he consoled himself with the reflection that it was but a bare quarter of a mile to the serai along a straight deserted high road. Even a real Miss-Sahiba might go so far alone, unhurt; so, after pausing a moment from force of habit to re-light the lantern, he ambled after his charge as fast as his old legs could carry him. Suddenly he heard a noise such as he had never heard before close behind him. A horrid, panting noise, and then something between a bellow and a whistle. He turned, saw a red eye glaring at him, and the next instant the infernal monster darted past him, whirring, snorting. In pursuit, of course, of Elflida Norma!

What tyranny was here! What defiance of custom! Saw anyone ever the like?—on a decent metalled road—and only the ayah—God forgive him the lie!—wanting to make all things in order?

These confused, helpless thoughts ran swifter in the old man's mind that his legs carried his body, as he followed in pursuit of the monster. The lantern, swinging wildly, hindered such light as there might have been without it, but he knew the Thing was ahead of him, by the truly infernal smell it left behind it.

And then from the darkness ahead came a curiously familiar cry, "Hut, hut! (get out of the way). Oh, damn!"

A crash followed; then silence. A few seconds afterwards he was gazing, helplessly bewildered, at two figures who were looking at each other wrathfully across the white streak of road.

One he knew. It was Elflida Norma, her impromptu ball dress metamorphosed by her race into loose white draperies out of which the small dark head and slim throat, with its circlet of big blue beads, rose as from clouds. The other, unknown, was that of a tall, fair young man.

"If you had only stood still," the latter was saying angrily, "I could have managed, but you dodged about like—like——" His eyes had taken her in by this time, and he paused in his simile. But hers had wandered to the monster prone in the dust; and she stepped closer to it curiously.

"I suppose it is named a motor bicycle," she said, coolly. "I have not seen one in our place before, only in picture books. I am glad."

There were no regrets or apologies. And even Imân Khân, when he recovered his breath, made no inquiries as to whether the young man had hurt himself in getting out of the Miss-Sahiba's way He simply looked at the wheels of the bicycle and then at its stalwart young rider.

God had been kind and sent a husband in a miraculous car!

II

Imân Khân sate in the early dawn, putting such polish as never before was put on a pair of rather large size Oxford shoes. So far all had gone well. His own vast experience, aided by the stranger's complete ignorance of Indian ways, had sufficed for much; and Alexander Alexander Sahib (all the twelve Imâns be praised for such a name!) was now comfortably asleep in the bastion opposite the widow's quarters, under the impression that the hastily produced whisky and soda, with a "sand beef" (sandwich) in case hunger had come on the road, the simple but clean bedding, and briefly, all the luxuries of a night's sleep after a somewhat severe shaking, were due to the commercial instincts of a good old chap in charge of the usual rest-house: that being exactly what Imân had desired as a beginning.

The sequel required thought, and, as he polished, his brain was full of plans for the immediate future. One thing was certain, however, quite certain. The husband God had sent in a car must not be allowed to ride away on it before seeing more of the Miss-*Sahiba*. Arrangements must be made, as they always had to be made in the best families. Generally it began with a tennis party—but this, of course, was out of the question—and perhaps the accident on the road might be taken as an equivalent for that introduction. Then there were dances, and "fools-food" (picnics). The one might be considered as taken also, the others were out of season in the heats of May. There remained drives and dinners. Both possible, but both required time; therefore time must be had. The *chota-sahib* must not ride away after breakfast, as he had settled on doing, should he and the monster be found fit for the road.

Now the *chota-sahib* seemed none the worse for his fall, as Imân, in his capacity of valet, had had opportunities of judging. The inference, therefore, was obvious. It must be the monster who was incapable.

Imân gave a finishing glisten to the shoes and placed

them decorously side by side, ready to be taken in when the appointed hour came for shaving water. Then he went over and looked at the motor bicycle, which was accommodated in the verandah. It did not pant or smell now as if it were alive, but for all that it looked horribly healthy and strong. It was evidently not a thing to be broken inadvertently by a casual push. Then a thought struck him, and he ambled off to the old blacksmith, who still lived in the serai arcade and boasted of his past trade of mending springs, shoeing horses, and selling to travellers his own manufactures in the way of wonderful soft iron pocket-knives with endless blades and corkscrews warranted to draw themselves instead of the corks!

"Ari Bhai," said Imân mildly to this worthy, "thou art a prince of workmen, truly; but come and see something beyond thy art in iron. Bâpri bâp! I warrant thou couldst not even guess at its inner parts."

Could he not? Tezoo, the smith, thought otherwise, and being clever as well as voluble, hit with fair correctness on pivots, cog-wheels, and such-like inevitables of all machinery, the result of the interview being that Imân, armed with his kitchen chopper and a bundle of skewers, had a subsequent *tête-à-tête* with the monster, in which the latter came off second best; so that when its owner, fortified by a most magnificent breakfast (served in the verandah by reason of the central room of that bastion having an absolutely unsafe roof), went to overhaul his metal steed, he was fairly surprised.

"It is a verra remarkable occurrence," he said softly to himself as his deft hands busied themselves with nuts and screws (for he was a Scotch engineer on his way to take up an appointment as superintendent in a canal workshop), "most remarkable. And would be a fine example to the old ministers thesis that accident is not chance. There's just a method in it that is absolutely uncanny."

In short, even with the smithy on the premises, of which the good old chap in charge spoke consolingly, it was clear he could not start before evening, if then. Not that it mattered so much, since he had plenty of time in which to join his billet.

Thus, as he smoked his pipe, the question came at last for which the old matchmaker had been longing.

"And who would the young lady be who smashed me up last night?"

In his reply Imân dragged in *Warm E-stink Sahib Bahadur* and a vast amount of extraneous matter out of his own past experiences. Regarding the present, however, he was distinctly selective without being actually untruthful. The late *E-stink Sahib's* widow and children, for instance, being also at rest in the serai, were equally under his charge. And this being so, since there was but one public room in which dinner could possibly be served as it should be served—here Imân made a digression regarding the rights of the sahib-logue at large and *E-stink Sahib's* family in particular—it was possible that the Huzoor might meet his fellow-lodgers and the Miss-*Sahiba* again.

In fact, he—Imân—would find it more convenient if the meal were eaten together and at the same time, and the mem—her absence being one of the eliminated truths—would, he knew, fall in with any suggestion of his; which statement again was absolutely true.

Alec Alexander, lost in the intricacies of a piston-rod, acquiesced mechanically, though in truth the likelihood of seeing such a remarkably pretty face again was not without its usual unconscious charm to a young man.

This charm, however, became conscious half an hour afterwards, when hard at work in the smithy, his coat off, his sleeves rolled up, showing milk-white arms above his tanned wrists, he looked up from the bit of glowing iron on the anvil and saw a large pair of blue eyes and a large string of blue beads about an almost childish throat.

It struck him that both were as blue as the sky inarching the wide inarched square of the old serai. It struck him also that the eyes, anyhow, had more in common with the sky than with the house made with hands in which he stood, even though dead kings had built it. Yes! the whole figure did not belong somehow to its environment; to the litter of wasted forage, the ashes of dead fires, to the desertion and neglect of a place which, having served its

purpose of a night's lodging, has been left behind on the road. It seemed worth more than that.

"I gave you a nice toss, didn't I?" said Elflida Norma, breaking in on his quasi-sentimental thought with a certain complacency. "If you had got out of my way it would have been more better.

"You mean if you hadn't got in mine," he replied, grimly. "But don't let us quarrel about that now. The mischief's done so far as I am concerned."

The blue eyes narrowed in eager interest.

"Have you broken things inside, too?" she asked, sympathy absent, pure curiosity present in her tone.

"No! I didn't," he said, shortly. "I'm not of the kind that breaks easily."

She considered him calmly from head to foot. "No-o-o," she admitted, sparingly. "I suppose not—but your arms look veree brittle, like china—I suppose that is from being so—being so chicken-white."

"Perhaps," he said, still more shortly, and was relieved when Imân (having from the cook-room, where he was feverishly feathering fowls in preparation for the night's feast, detected Elflida's flagrant breach of etiquette in having anything whatever to do with a coatless sahib) hurried across to beguile his charge back to the paths of propriety by reporting that Lily-*baba* (to whom the girl was devoted) evinced a determination to eat melons with her brothers, which he, Imân, was far too busy to frustrate.

"You need not make such pother about big dinner to-night," she said, viciously, when, with the absolutely accommodating Lily in her arms, she stood watching the far less interesting process of pounding forcémeat on a curry stone; "for I heard him tell the smith that he would go this evening if—well, if somebody kept his temper in boiling oil. Such a queer idea—as if anybody could!"

Old Imân's hands fell for an instant from the *munâdu* (Maintenon) cutlets he was preparing, for he understood the frail foundation on which his chance of manufacturing a husband stood. Jullunder-sahib must be making a spring, and if the oil in which it had to be boiled—— But no! As cook, he knew something of the properties of hot fat,

and felt convinced that the spring would never be fried in time.

So all that long hot day he toiled and slaved in company with an anatomy of a man whom he had unearthed from the city. A man who had also in his youth served the white blood, but had never risen beyond the scullery. A man who called him "Great Artificer," and fanned him and the charcoal fire indiscriminately according to their needs.

And all that long hot day on the other side of the arcaded square work went on also, so that the clang of metal on anvil or cook-room fire rose in antagonism on the dusty sunshine which slept between them. Dinner or no dinner? Spring or no spring? And the circling dark shadows of the kites above in the blue sky were almost the only other signs of life, for Elflida Norma had found sleep the easiest way of keeping Lily-*baba* from the melons, and the boys slept as they slept always.

But as the sun set Imân knew that fate had decided in favour of the dinner, for Jullunder-sahib came over from the smithy with empty hands, and found hot water in his room, and the change of white raiment he carried in his knapsack laid out decorously on the bed.

He took the hint and dressed for dinner, even to the buttonhole of jasmine which he found beside his hair-brush.

Elflida Norma, under similar supervision, dressed also. In fact, everything was dressed, including the flat tin lids of the saucepans which Imân had impressed into doing duty as side-dishes. Surrounded by castellated walls of rice paste, supporting cannon balls of alternate spinach and cochinealed potatoes, they really looked very fine. So did Imân himself, starched to inconceivable stiffness of deportment. So even did the anatomy, who, promoted for once to the dining-room, grinned at the young man and the girl, at the Great Artificer and all his works, with his usual indiscrimination.

And, in truth, each and all deserved grins. Yet Elflida Norma looked at Alec Alexander, he at her, and both at the dinner table set out marvellously with great trails of the common pumpkin vine looped with the cheap silver

tinsel every Indian bazaar provides, and felt a sudden shyness of themselves, of each other, and the unwonted snowiness and glitter.

"Cler or wite?" said Imân, his old hands in difficulties with two soup plates. There was a dead silence.

"He means soup," faltered Elflida Norma desperately, wishing herself with the boys who were being regaled with curry and rice in her room, and thereinafter became dumb until the next course, when a sense of duty made her supplement Imân's "fish-bar'l" with the explanation that it was not really fish, which was not procurable, but another form of fowl.

So, in fact, were the side dishes which followed, and in which Imân had so far surpassed his usual self that Elflida was perforce as helpless as her companion for all save eating them solidly in due order. The old man, however, was too much absorbed in the due handling of "bred-sarse" with the fowl, which was at last allowed to appear under the title of "roschikken," too much discomforted by the subsidence of his favourite "sikken," a cheese *soufflée*, to notice silence, or the lack of it, until, just as—the worst strain over—he was perfunctorily apologising for the impossibility of "Hice-puddeen," a fateful cry came from the next room and Elflida started to her feet.

"It's Lily," she began; but Imân frowned her into her seat again, and turned to the anatomy superbly. "Go!" he said with dignity, "and bid the ayah see to Lily-*baba*."

The result, however, was unsatisfactory, and a certain obstinacy grew to Elflida's small face, which finally blossomed into open rebellion and a burst of confidence.

"You see," she said, those blue eyes of hers almost blinking as she narrowed them with earnestness, "she smells guavas, and they are more her hobby than melons even."

The young man smiled.

"Who's Lily?" he asked; "your sister, I suppose."

"My half-sister," she replied, solemnly. "But she will cry on, you see, if she is not let to come to my place."

"Then let her come—why not?"

"It is an evil custom," began Imân, as the order was

given. He knew no graver blame than that even for a whole Decalogue in ruins; but Elflida Norma stamped her foot as she had stamped it in the polka, so he had to give in and thus avoid worse exposures.

And, after all, the introduction of the dimpled brown child in a little white night-shift, who leant shyly against Elflida's blue beads, seemed to help the conversation. So much so that after coffee and cigarettes had been served in the verandah, old Imân felt as if success must crown his efforts—if only there were time! But how could there be time when the possible husband had arranged, since the motor bicycle refused to be mended with the appliances at his disposal, to have it conveyed by country cart overnight to the nearest railway station, five miles off, whither he must tramp it, he supposed? next morning, to catch the mail train.

It was when, pleasantly, yet still carelessly, Alec Alexander was saying good-bye to the blue eyes and the blue beads, with the brown baby cuddled up comfortably in the girl's slender arms, that Imân, with a sinking heart, played his last card by saying that there was no need for the Huzoor to tramp. The Miss-*Sahiba* and Lily-*baba* invariably took a carriage airing before breakfast, and could quite easily drop the Huzoor at the railway station.

"Yes! I could drop you quite easily at that place. It would be more better than the walk," assented Elflida Norma, with a Sphinx-like smile. Her heart was beating faster than usual. She was beginning to be amused with the tinsel glitter and the general pretence. It was like playing a game. Still she slept soundly; and so did the young engineer, and Lily-*baba*, and the boys gorged with as-a-rule-prohibited native dainties. Even the smith slept, and the anatomy had already reverted to reality, his transient dignity vanishing into thin air. So that in that wide ruined serai, built by dead kings, all were at rest save the Great Artificer, Imân, who sate among the ruins of his dinner, satisfied, yet still conscious of failure. Something was lacking, which once more only God could create—only a miraculous car could bring.

In truth, if any vehicle might from outward appearance

claim miraculous powers, it was the extraordinary sort of four-wheeled dogcart which, in the cool morning air, appeared as Imân's last card. He had, indeed, not wandered from the truth in telling Alec Alexander that carriages were not to be hired in that sahib-forsaken spot, and it had been only with extreme difficulty that he had raised these four wheels of varying colours and a body painted with festoons of grapes, all tied together with ropes.

Still, it held the party. Imân, with Lily-*baba* in his arms, on the box by the driver, Elflida and the young engineer disposed on the back seat. The horse, it is true, showed signs of never having been in harness before, but this was not so evident to those behind, and Imân held tight and set his teeth, knowing that success has sometimes to be bought dearly.

Still, it was with no small measure of relief when they were close on their destination, and the beast settled down to the two hundred yards of collar work leading up to the small station level with the high embankment of the permanent way, that he turned round to peep at progress on the back seat.

Had anything happened? His heart sank at the cool, collected air with which the possible husband took his ticket; but it rose again, when, after saying good-bye to Lily-*baba* and tipping the coachman, the young man went off to the platform with Elflida, as if it were a matter of course she should see him off. In truth, that is exactly what he did feel concerning this distinctly pretty and rather jolly little girl with a bad temper.

And Elflida? Her world seemed to have had a fresh start in growth, it held greater possibilities than before, that was all.

So everything had been in vain, even Imân's sense of duty towards the white blood he had served so long.

"Good-bye!" He could not hear the words, but he saw the young hands meet to unclasp again, as with a whistle the mail train rushed out from behind a dense mango clump, and the Westinghouse brakes brought a sudden grinding rattle to the quiet morning air.

"All was over!" thought Imân sadly, as still sitting on the box with Lily-*baba*, he watched. Surely it had not been his fault. He had done all—only the cheese *soufflée* had failed, and that happened sometimes even in the house of Lât-Sahibs. Yet it was over.

It was, indeed. Almost including the miraculous car, as deprived of its driver, who was spending part of his tip in the sweet stall, the horse, frightened at the train, reared, bounded forward, and then, finding its progress barred in front by a railing, swerved on its track, and came past the station again, heading for that downward incline with the steep banks falling away on either side.

Elflida grasped the position first, and with a cry of "Lily! Lily!" was at the horse's head as it passed. The possible husband was not far behind—just far enough to make the off rein as convenient to his pursuing feet as the near one, to which she clung, half dragged, helpless, half in wild determination to keep pace with the terrified beast.

"Let go!" he shouted. "He'll get you down, and then—let go, I say!"

She did not answer. In truth, she had no breath for words. And, besides, her mind was not clear enough to grasp his order, though it grasped something else—namely, that relief from her dead weight on one side must bring a swerve to the other. And that must not be till the embankment was passed, or the man holding to the off rein must go under.

"Let go!" he shouted, again and again, as he, in his turn, grasped her purpose; but he might as well have shouted to the dead.

* * * * *

"I believe—I hope—she has fainted," said Alec Alexander, with a catch in his voice not all due to breathlessness, as, the runaway safe held by other captors, he stooped over the girl who lay in the dust, her hands still clenched over a broken rein. Then he lifted her tenderly and carried her back to the station whence the mail train,

careless of such trivialities as miraculous cars, had departed.

And if on his way he kissed the closed blue eyes and the blue beads round the childish throat, who shall blame him?

* * * * *

Anyhow, the hot dry nights of May were not over before old Imân's voice rose once more in declamation over the unforgettable story of the white blood.

But this time sleep did not come to the black-and-tan tribe gathered in the light of the floating oil wick. For the boys were watching something they had never seen before—the icing of a wedding cake.

And so the long-deferred personal climax came at last.

"The trouble being over, the masters were masters again, and I took Sonny-*baba* back to his people. And wherefore not? Seeing I had eaten of their salt all my life and they of mine. Yea! even unto wedding cakes. Look, my sons! That is done, and I, Imân, the faithful one by name and nature made it."

* * * * *

There was but one flaw in the old man's content on the great day; for he had managed to get a ham cheap for the "suffer," and Mrs. Hastings, only too glad of greater freedom in the future, had consented to his turning his attention to the education of the young couple and Lily-*baba*, who was to live with them. That flaw was a slight irregularity in what he was pleased to call a "too-liver-ot" on the said cake. Not that it really mattered. The true lover's knot itself was there, though the hands which fashioned it were not so young and steady as they had been when they caught up Sonny-*baba* and carried him to the safe shadows.

Yet, old as they were, those hands had forgotten no duty. *E-stink Sahib's* widow, absorbed with a friend in the recipe of a mango pickle she meant to make on the morrow—a pickle full of forbidden turmeric and mustard oil—had

to be reminded of her *rôle* as bride's mother over and over again, but it was Imân who hung a horseshoe for luck on the miraculous car—drawn this time by an old stager—Imân, who was ready with rice, Imân, who finally ran after the departing lovers to fling the old white shoe, in which Elflida had danced the hee-haw polka, into their laps as they sate on the back seat, and then, overbalancing himself in the final effort, to tumble into the dust, where he remained blissfully uncertain as to praise or blame, murmuring blandly, "What a custom is here!"

THE WISDOM OF OUR LORD GANESH

"The wisdom of Sri Ganêsh—the wisdom of our Lord Ganêsh."*

Through and through my fever-drugged brain the words came, compelling, insistent; forcing me away from reality, forcing me back into the past. Yet I knew perfectly where I was; I remembered distinctly that having felt unusually tired after rather a hot day's march I had pitched the little *tente d'abri*—which was my home during a sketching tour in Wales—rather closer to the main road than I generally did, and had thereinafter promptly succumbed to an unmistakable go of fever and ague, a half-forgotten legacy left behind by many years of Indian life.

Yes, I could remember distinctly the bramble-and-nut-hidden quarry hole, with its little inner sward of sweet sheep-bitten grass where I had pitched the tent. I knew that if I were to call, someone of the rumbling cart wheels, which came at intervals along the road, might stop and seek for the caller; but I lay still. I was hard-happed round and round with the curious content which comes as the chills and the aches are passing into the fire flood of fever that thrills the finger-tips and sets the brain fizzling like champagne.

"The wisdom of Sri Ganêsh—the wisdom of our Lord Ganêsh."

Why on earth should that haunt me here in Wales? on a piece, no doubt, of Nat Gwynne's property.

Nat Gwynne! Then I knew. It was because I had seen him in the distance that day, driving a pair of grey ponies, tandem, with a pretty young girl beside his coarse, heavy, good looks; heavier than they had been, though, heaven knows! refinement had never stood much in his way. And they were to be married to-morrow! Married to

* Ganêsh is the Indian God of Wisdom. He is always portrayed with the head of an elephant.

Gwynne of Garthgwynne! Couldn't anyone tell her what she was doing? Couldn't anyone save her, as the wisdom of Sri Ganêsh had saved that other one? . . .

And then in a second I was gone. I was under the brassy blue sky of India, and from the twisted tufts of marsh-grasses by the elephant's feet came a native beater's lament—"As God sees me it is invisible—what a tyranny is here."

"Bid Ganêsh seek," said Nat Gwynne's voice, imperatively from the howdah from which we were both shooting. He was in a Lancer regiment cantooned in the native State where for many years I had been consulting engineer.

The *mahout*, seated on the big brute's neck, turned calmly. "It is against the orders that Sri Ganêsh, King of Elephants and Lord of Wisdom, should touch carrion even of the Huzoor's."

I looked at my old friend Mahadeo with astonishment. He and I had been out on Ganêsh, the Rajah's finest elephant, scores of times, and again and again the cunning old rogue's inquisitive trunk had nosed out and up a partridge or snipe which the coolies had failed to find.

"He hath a scent like a bed of roses," old Mahadeo would say proudly, "and as for wisdom! Doth he not hold the Huzoor even as his own *mahout*?"

Which delicate piece of flattery was true, for old Ganêsh, pad elephant to the bankrupt young scoundrel of a Rajah, had taken a fancy to me, as elephants do take fancies.

So, seeing at a glance that something lay beneath the surface of the bitter hatred in the dark face, and the wild, wicked rage of the white one, I said, quickly. "Seek! my brother!"

Ganêsh swayed forward, his trunk curling like a snake, his wicked little eyes alert, a faint *frou-frou* of a blowing sound seeming to quiver the grasses; and there, grasped softly in the prehensile end was a dead jack snipe! As he put it deferentially and politely into my outstretched hand I seemed to catch a contemptuous flicker in his eye, as who would say, "What an amount of fuss about such a very little piece of pork," as the Jew said when a thunderstorm found him eating sausage.

But that it was *not* a little piece of pork between those two, still glaring at each other, was evident.

Mahadeo's usually gentle face had taken on a stony stare that held in it something of limitless power; while Nat Gwynne's anger was almost obscured by sheer disgust at having to keep his hands off another man's servant.

"By God!" he cried. "It's lucky for you, you pig, that I'm not your master—but—but I'll try to be—I'll buy this big brute when they sell the bankrupt State up next month, and I'll buy you, curse you, and I'll . . ."

"Do hold your tongue, Gwynne," I said to him in a low voice, for his temper was notorious, and once he lost control over himself he would often behave like a madman. As, indeed, he had every right to be, since the record of the Gwynnes of Garthgwynne was a black one.

Mahadeo, however, supplied the return to calm.

"The Huzoor is *mast*," he said to me, rapidly in low contemptuous Hindustani, turning the while to sit, immovable as ever, a mere head and trunk of a man, all else being hidden by the elephant's great shields of ears. "He is as the beasts that perish. And Ganêsh, too, nears his time of power—" he pointed to the great head he bestrode where, oozing apparently from a slight hollow in the skin a few drops of ichor showed, half hardened into amber, "so let those who would harm him—or *his friends* beware!"

But there was nothing of which to be beware thereinafter, for all became peace. How hot the sun was! And the guns, too! Almost too hot to hold. But how cool it was in the camp down in a mango-grove beside a tank with great cane brakes stretching away into the stars under the moonlight! And how peaceful! How one slept, and slept, and slept, drowsed to dreamlessness by the great peace of the immovable shadows, the greater peace of the light behind them. . . .

Ye powers above! What was that? Even now, remembering it, all was as it had seemed then. Shadow on light, light on shadow . . . a curse, a cry . . . something young and slim fleeing, half in light, half in shadow! Then a

sudden trumpet, a rattle as of chained front feet, one little sob. . . .

How steadily the moonlight shone through the branches on that small upturned face which was all Ganêsh's feet had spared.

"Who? What?" I gasped, uncomprehending, staring stupidly at Mahadeo on his knees beside the dead girl, at Gwynne, still dressed, the buttons on his mess jacket glittering like diamonds, his face all working with horror and dismay. But there was no room for anything but the old man's voice, quiet, restrained:

"She was my granddaughter, Huzoor. But a light thing. She must have gone too near the King of Elephants, being as this slave said, near to his time of power. What then? *It is the wisdom of our Lord Ganêsh! The wisdom of Sri Ganêsh!*"

The sound of his voice died away softly, and the wind carried it further, and further, and further. . . .

Such an odd wind! Soft, warm, with a faint perfume in it, blowing on my hands, my face. And behind it a familiar sighing sound with the echo of a chuckle in it. . . .

Was it possible? I started up, my brain in a whirl. Did I, or did I not see in the moonbeam which stole through a chink in the tent flap, something sinuous, that curved and bent caressingly? And beyond it, where the flap divided, was or was that not a rough image of the Elephant Headed God of Wisdom painted in hot ochres on an elephant's fore front? I was out of the blankets in a second, flinging back the tent flaps with a delirious laugh. Aye! It was true! Earth and air alike seemed blocked by a huge mass of flesh that quivered all over with delight. Come! this was something like a fever dream! To have an Indian Rajah's pad elephant to ride on—to go whither you would for a fresh breeze—to cool your brain.

"*Baito*, Ganêsh! *Baito*!" I cried, giving the familiar order; but the next instant my vaingloriousness ended in a shiver, almost of fear, as the brute obeyed, sinking noiselessly and laying its trunk, curled round to protect itself against injury, ready for me to mount.

Scarcely knowing what I did I caught familiarly at the

big drooping ears, I felt the trunk beneath my feet tilted gingerly to aid me, and there I was, my head reeling madly, in the old familiar place!

But around me? Around me half Wales, bathed in broad moonlight, lay peaceful; with, in the distance, a faint shimmer telling of the sea—the far sea that still seemed to sound in my ears as if, indeed, I lay upon its very shore listening to the break and burden of the waves which came from far away—so very far away.

I think the effort must have made me relapse into unconsciousness, for the next thing I remember is finding myself propped up by pillows in the howdah, and hearing a familiar voice break in upon the ceaseless fall of the waves which filled my ears.

And from the voice I gathered vaguely that it was not a dream at all. This was indeed Ganêsh, who had been sold because of his great height to an English showman, and this was no other than old Mahadeo, who would not leave his charge, and had come over the black water, also, where there was nothing good to be had save rum; rum that kept the cold out on these chill September nights when Ganêsh had to do his marches from town to town, since the sight of an elephant might frighten the traffic by day. There was evidently some of that rum still in the old man's voice as he chid Ganêsh glibly for having been restive and thrown his unsteady *mahout* on the road. But then had not the animal always loved the Huzoor, even as his master? And must he not have nosed him out as he passed, the Lord of Elephants having, as ever, a scent as of rose gardens? Which was as well, since now the Huzoor would be able to get a doctor-*sahib* and medicine. . . .

I tried to understand, but it was hard to get at anything with fever raging in one's brain, while the rhythmic roll of the elephant's pace as we lilted away over half Wales seemed to blend with the fall of those waves from very far away. Once I remember asking how many couple of snipe we had killed. After that Mahadeo furtively brought out a bottle and gave me something fiery which seemed to do me good, though he muttered to himself that he could but do his best—his was not the wisdom of Sri Ganêsh.

"You—you shouldn't say that to me, you—you old fool," I murmured, weakly. "You should say it as you said to—to—to Gwynne-*sahib*—Gwynne-*sahib*, who is going to be married to-morrow—don't you know? Such a pretty girl—such a very pretty girl—such a poor, pretty girl. . . ."

I don't know quite what I said; I am glad, indeed, not to be able to remember, but I have a vague recollection of becoming a trifle maudlin, and finally of pointing out, amid a cloud-like shadow of trees that lay on the far horizon, the position—or thereabouts—of Garthgwynne, whither the young bride was to be led the next evening.

Now, in all this, as I recount it from a blurred, fever-stricken memory, allowance must be made for illusion. I don't know if it really happened, I can only vouch for my belief that I actually saw and did these things. I think now, therefore, that I fell asleep, always with that recurring fall of distant waves in my ear, until I woke suddenly to a loud hilarious burst of half-drunken laughter.

"Stop him! Hie! Gone away! Hello! Gwynne! Pity the bride! If you don't go to bed there'll be no wedding day! Yoicks! Poor devil! wants to escape the halter. Hie! You there! Best man! You're bound to bring him up sober."

We were in the deep shadow of the famous cedar trees, and one look at the old house beyond the lawn was enough for recognition. Yes! it was Plas Garthgwynne, favoured of picture postcards, favoured of wild, wicked romance and legend. It was all blazing with lights, so, despite the waning of the moon, I could see—clustering at the door and dispersed over the gravel sweep—the mad rush of Gwynne of Garthgwynne's last bachelor party as it tumbled tipsily in chase of a reeling figure that came straight towards us across the lawn to lose itself in the opposite shadows.

And then a hard feminine voice dominated the uproar:

"Leave him alone, you fools! The night air will sober him; and if it doesn't, there's no hurry to carry on the breed."

Something of brutal truth behind the brutal coarseness of the remark fell like a wet blanket over the half-fuddled guests; some of them picked themselves up

moodily from the gravel, others found stability from friends, and so they drifted in unsteadily, dominated once more by that hard, feminine, unwomanly voice asserting that if he didn't crawl back to burrow in a quarter-of-an-hour, she'd send the butler to look for him.

And thereinafter came quiet; while one by one the glittering windows of the house sank to darkness.

And yet it was not dark, after all, surely? Or was there a curious halo of light emanating from old Mahadeo's head; a halo which distorted him somehow, which piled his low turban into a high tiara, and made his nose show long, so long—almost as long as the Elephant-Faced God-of-Wisdom . . . in the Indian shrines. . . .

Ah! There he was! . . .

Gwynne of Garthgwynne, standing on a bit of open beyond the shadow—behind him a grey shimmer of mere set thick with water lilies—his legs very wide apart, his watch in his hand—it had some electric appliance about it, and the feeble light streaming upwards showed his face full of hard, soul-revealing lines. What a face!—the face of a devil let loose—set free from the fetters of conventional life.

"Two o'clock," he muttered. "Well! whats'h a-matter. Sh'upposin' am drunk she'll have to put up—Gwynne Garthgwynne, d—mn her—my wife—mother of Gwynne's-Garth . . ."

"Forward, Sri Ganêsh!" The order came soft but swift, and we were out of the shadows. What was it out of the shadows, also—out of the Dim Shadows which shroud Life in the Beginning and the End, which caught me irresistibly, making me say sharply as one who has waited long, "Come along, Gwynne! do—there's a good fellow."

For an instant surprise seemed to struggle with satisfaction in his drink-sodden brain. The tall, heavy figure swayed, lurched. I could see its every detail, the very buttons on the mess jacket—worn doubtless out of bravado this last evening of bachelorhood—shone, as they had done that night years ago amid the shadow and shine of the

mango-tôpe; for a radiance seemed to have sprung from earth and sky in which nothing could be hidden.

Then suddenly came his old reckless, half-insane burst of laughter. "Come," he echoed, drunkenly, "Why—why—shno't? Whatsh' larks—chursh, fi'rs joll'—lit'—bride—no bridegroom!—joll'—good'—larks'h, eh! Off to Phildelp'ia in the mornin'—see th'other one—joll'—lit' one. *Bait*, you pig, Ganêsh! *Bait!*"

It all passed like a flash of lightning. The elephant was down and up again, and the last thing I remember was hearing Gwynne of Garthgwynne's drunken voice say, "Hello! old Mahadeo, eh! Well! go it, ol' man. Givs'h some of—wish-dom—Shri Ganêsh—eh—what?"

When I roused again it was dawn; pale primrose dawn over a cloudless sea.

It was the strange wind that roused me, the soft, warm wind that passed over my face and sought something else—and found it. Soft as a snake the elephant's trunk found the drunken man's neck as he lay asleep, half hanging out of the cushioned howdah, and closed on it. The sight drove the blur from my mind, and in an instant I saw all things clearly.

We were on the very edge of a high cliff. Below us lay the scarce dawn-lit waters of the calm sea. But between me and that tender distant sky, what form was this with triple crown and wise stern human eyes looking out of an animal's face?

Wisdom itself! Wisdom come to judgment.

There was a moment's pause. I clung to the howdah's side as if turned to stone. I seemed to know what was coming—to realise the verdict which that ultimate wisdom must give. Then in a clarion voice the words came:

"By the order of the Lord Ganêsh, kill."

The softness, the tenderness of the snaky coil, so sensitive that the finest thread in God's world can scarce escape it, changed suddenly to iron. There was no cry, no struggle. Gwynne of Garthgwynne's body swung high in air, then, flung from it with all leviathan's strength, fell, and fell, and fell . .

* * * * *

When the roaring of the distant sea ceased in mine ears about a fortnight afterwards, I found that the nine days' wonder of Gwynne of Garthgwynne's disappearance on his wedding night had died down. He had rushed out rollicking drunk—that all knew. He had not returned. The butler sent out to seek for him had sought other seekers, but all in vain. They were still dragging the mere for him, but the flood gates of the river (of which it was a backwater) had been open that night, and the body might have drifted out to sea. So there had been no wedding, and a distant heir, barely related to the old stock, was ready to take possession so soon as doubt was over. As for me, the early postman, attracted by my moaning, had found me half-in and half-out of my blankets in the *tente d'abri* behind the bramble screen of the quarry.

Was it then all a dream? Even if it were not . . .

Was it not the wisdom of our Lord Ganêsh?

I decided, at last, to say nothing about that dream of a marvellous moonlight ride on an elephant over half Wales. Twinges of conscience assailed me at times, but they were laid to rest for ever about Christmas-tide, when, going through a small town in the Midlands, I was met, in passing a new cottage hospital on its environs, by a glad cry—"The very man I want! I've got a poor soul here who won't die. He ought really to have been at peace two days ago—but he goes on and on. You see, he's an Indian or something, and we can't speak the lingo—you can, I expect?"

I followed the doctor, with whom I had a slight acquaintance, into the ward, with a foreboding at my heart. I knew it was old Mahadeo, and that, indeed, he wanted me. And it was. He lay tucked up between clean sheets on an English bed with two English hospital nurses fadding about him, speechless, gasping, at the very point and spit of death, yet waiting—waiting . . .

I knew what he wanted, and without a word, his dark eyes following me in dim gladness, I threw back the clothes and got a firm grip of the sheet at his head. He should at least die as a Hindu should die. "Now, doctor!" I said, "if you'll take the feet we will let him find freedom outside."

A nurse started forward. "But the case is pneumonia—double pneumonia——"

The doctor hesitated; they always are in the hands of the nurses.

"Look here, Jones," I cried, sharply. "This man doesn't want clinical thermometers, and draw-sheets, and caps. He wants freedom. He wants to die as his religion tells him he must die, on Mother Earth—aye—even if her bosom is white with snow."

And it was, for it was Christmas-tide.

So we lifted him out, the doctor and I, and laid him down on Heaven's white quilt. He just rolled over, face down, into the cool pillow.

"*Râm-Râm—Sita-Râm,*" I whispered, kneeling beside him to give the last dying benediction of his race. Such a quaint one! Only the name of what to it, is superman and superwoman. A last appeal to the higher instincts of humanity.

There was one little sob. I thought I heard the beginning of the old refrain:

"The wisdom of our Lord Ganêsh——" Then he had found freedom.

"You seem to know their ways, sir," said a horsey-looking man who had come in with us and who had evidently something to do with the show. "So, if you could give us a 'elp with this pore fellar's beast, I'd be obliged. Hasn't touched food this ten days—never since the old man took worse, and a elephant, sir, is a dead loss to a show. The master lef' 'im here with me, but I'm blowed if I can do nothing with him."

I found Ganêsh happier than his master, for, no place being large enough for him, he lay in the open; but they had stretched a tarpaulin over him like a rick-cover, as a protection.

A glance told me he was far gone, though he lay crouched, not prone; his trunk—marvellous agent for good or ill—stretched out before him beyond shelter into the snow.

As I came up to him, I fancied I saw a flicker in his eyes, those eyes so small, so full of wisdom. Then I laid

in front of him the old man's turban, ragged, worn, which I had begged of the prim nurses. In a second the whole, huge, inert mass of flesh became instinct with life. He rose to his feet with incredible swiftness, and softly encircling the old ragged pugree, raised it gently and placed it in the master's seat. For a moment I doubted what would come next; but the instinct which is held in leviathan's small brain is great. He knew by some mysterious art that the master was dead, that the human mind which had been his guide was gone.

He took one step forward, threw up his trunk, and the echoes of the surrounding houses cracked with the roaring bellow of his trumpet as he swayed sideways and fell dead.

That was all the little smug provincial English town ever knew of the

"Wisdom of our Lord Ganêsh."

THE SON OF A KING

"Barring my pay," he said, ruefully, "I haven't a coin in the world." And for the moment, newly accepted lover as he was, his eyes actually left hers and wandered away to the reddening yellow of the sunset with a certain resentment at the limitations of his world.

"Father has plenty!" she put in joyously. And for the moment her hand actually touched his in a new-born sense of appropriation and right of re-assurance which made her blush faintly. It also made his eyes return to hers, whereat she blushed furiously, and then tried to cover her confusion by a jest. "Well! he has. Hasn't he the best collection of coins in India?"

"He wouldn't part with one of them, though, for love or money. And I doubt his parting with you—though I could pay a lot—in love."

He had both her hands now, and the very newness of the position made her fence with the emotion it aroused.

"He parted with duplicates."

"But you aren't one—there isn't anyone like you in the wide, wide world. And I'm glad you're not. I don't want anyone else to be as lucky as I am."

She retreated still further from realities into jesting. "Then he exchanges quite often, so, if you only set yourself to find something——" She broke off, and her face lit up. "Oh, Jim! I have such a delightful idea! You shall find the gold coin—you know the one I mean—with the date that is to settle, or unsettle, half the history of the world! Do you know, I really believe, if you helped him to confound all those German wiseacres, that father would be quite willing to exchange——"

"His daughter for the ducat! Perhaps. But, unfortunately—and quite between ourselves—I have my doubts

about the existence of that coin. Or if it does exist it is hopelessly hidden away for ever and ever and aye, like that blessed old buried city of his that we have all been hunting after this month past in the wilderness. I don't wish to be disrespectful to your father, Queenie, but I believe he dreamt of it—that is to say, if it didn't dream of him—one never knows which comes first——"

He paused, arrested in the egoism, the absolute individualism of love by the mystery of the collective life which was part even of that love, and once more his eyes wandered to the sun setting.

The sky had darkened on the horizon as the dust haze shadowed into purple, so that the distant edge of the low sand-hills, losing definite outline, seemed almost level. Yet far and near, from the feet of the lovers as they sat close together to that uncertain ending of their visible world, not a straight line was to be seen. Everything showed in curves—curves that told their unflinching tale of unseen circlings. The wrinkled ripples left by the last wind upon the sea of sand around them waved over the endless undulations of the desert, the sparse tussocks of coarse grass fell in fountains from their own centres, the stunted thorn-bushes were coiled and twisted on themselves like tangled skeins without a clue, the faint tracks of the sand-rats and the partridges wound snake-like in every direction, and even the footprints which had brought the two lovers in their present resting-place held the same hint of reference to unseen continuity, for, absorbed in Love's new world, they had wandered on aimlessly unheeding of the old one at their feet.

The result stared them in the face, now, in a firm yet undecided trail that was by far the most salient feature in the indefinite landscape. Jim Forrester laughed as he directed her attention to it.

"We seem to have gone round and round on our tracks; so the tents, and your respected father and civilisation generally must be—well! exactly where I would have sworn they were not. But that just bears out what I was saying. For all we know the whole thing may be a peculiarly vicious circle! The world may be going back when we think it is

going forward, and all the fine new things we think we find, may only be ourselves again. You and I, and the buried city and the gold coin—everything that we dream of, or that dreams of us, may only be part of the hidden circle which belongs to the curve of a life which has no straight lines—My God! take care—what the devil is that?"

That, if anything, *was* a straight line—straight as an arrow. And an arrow it was, still vibrating in the soft sand at their very feet. Jim Forrester stood up angrily and looked round for the archer who had drawn his bow at such an unpleasantly close venture. But no one was visible, so he stooped down and drew the arrow out of the sand. He had seen its like, or almost its like, before in those wild central tracts of sandy desert where the wandering tribes of goatherds still cling to the weapons of a past age. His companion, however, had not, and she bent to examine it curiously. The attitude made the fair coils of her hair, which were plaited round her head, look more than ever like a heavy gold crown.

"It takes one back to another world altogether," she said, watching him as he balanced it critically to appraise the perfection of its poise. "To a world where it was made, perhaps—for it looks old, doesn't it! I wonder who——"

She paused, becoming conscious that someone was standing behind her. Jim Forrester became conscious of the fact also, and showed it in such an aggressive way that she exclaimed hastily:

"Don't be angry with him, please. It must have been quite a chance—he couldn't have known we were here."

Even without the plea it would have been difficult for the young Englishman to refuse the chance of explanation to the figure which had appeared so unexpectedly. For, though in all outward accessories it was only that of a wandering goatherd, there was a calm dignity about it which claimed consideration. The fillet which bound the hair, sun-ripened to a rich brown on its waves and curls, was only a knotted bit of goats'-hair string, but the head it encircled had a youthful buoyancy such as the Greek sculptors gave to the young Apollo, a resemblance

enhanced by the statuesque folds of the rough goats'-hair blanketing which was sparsely draped over the bare, sinewy yet fine-drawn frame.

The face, however, was faintly aquiline, and the eyes, deep set between prominent brow and cheek bone, had the mingled fire and softness which in India so often redeems an otherwise commonplace countenance.

"I was stalking bustard, Huzoor," said the goatherd frankly, with a flash of very white teeth, "and being face down on the sand yonder behind the grasses saw nothing till the Presences stood up, but a glint of the sun on something."

He spoke to the man, but his eyes were on the girl's golden crown of hair.

Jim Forrester suddenly broke the arrow across his knee and threw the fragments from him into the sand ripples.

"Hand me over the bow, too," he said, peremptorily, then paused. "Hullo! Where the deuce did you get that—it is very old—the oldest I've seen—with a looped string, too?" he added, handling it curiously.

The goatherd smiled. "The Presence is welcome to keep it if he likes. I can get plenty more in the old city."

Once again, in speaking to the man, his eyes, askance, were on the girl.

She started. "In the old city," she echoed, "Jim! do you hear that—then you know where the old city is?"

The goatherd almost laughed. "Wherefore not, malika sahiba (queen-lady). Have I not lived in it always?"

"Lived in it! Then where is it?"

He swept a bronze hand in a circle which clipped her and him and the distant horizon.

"Here, queen-lady."

"Here," echoed Jim Forrester, incredulously; "but there are absolutely no signs of a city here."

"Plenty, Huzoor!" replied the goatherd, "if the Protector of the Poor will only use his eyes. Look yonder, how the ground rises to meet the curve of the sky; yonder, sahib, where the sunset red dyes deepest."

The young Englishman looked and frowned, but the girl gave a quick exclamation, and laid a hasty, surprised

touch on her lover's arm. "He is right, Jim," she said; "why didn't we notice it before? It stands out quite clear—an even rise all round centring on the unseen sun. How very curious! Ask him his name, Jim, and all that, so that father may be able to get hold of him. Fancy if we find the buried city—it would be as good almost as the gold coin, though somehow it makes me feel creepy." She gave a faint shiver as she spoke.

"The queen-lady should not remain in the wilderness when the sun has set," came in swift warning from the goatherd; "there is a fever fiend lurks in it and brings strange dreams."

Something almost of familiarity and command in the liquid yet vibrant voice made Jim Forrester frown again and say, shortly, "Yes; we must get back; it grows quite cold."

The girl looked half bewildered first to one and then to the other of the two tall figures that stood between her and the fast-fading light, against which she still saw clearly that faint swelling domed blue shadow, as of some other world forcing its way through the crust of the visible one.

So she stood silent, vaguely disturbed while the few questions necessary to identify the man who answered them were asked.

She did not speak, indeed, until with faces set on the right path for their camp and civilisation generally, they paused on the top of the first sand-rippled wave to look back. The shadowy dome was still there, swelling towards the vanished sun, and from its side the figure of the young goatherd rose into the darkening dust haze. He was calling to his flock, and the words of his old-time chant were clearly audible:

"O, seekers for Life's meat,
Your course is run!
Come home with weary feet,
Rest is so sweet.
What though one day be done?—
Another has begun.
The flock, the fold are one,
Where long years meet!"

"I hope he told us his real name!" she said, suddenly.

II

"My dear child, all your geese are swans—and so were your poor mother's before you," said her father. And then his eyes grew dreamy, perhaps over the intricacies of some new coins he was classifying; though, in truth, the memory of the young wife who had left him alone with a week-old baby in the days of his youth had somehow come harder to him during the last few happier, more home-like years since his daughter had returned to take her mother's place as mistress of the house; for the girl was very like the dead woman.

She had brought her father his afternoon cup of tea to the office-tent, cleared for that brief recess of the cloud of clerks and witnesses, who through the wide canvas-wings, set open to let in the air, could be seen huddled in groups among the sparse shadows of the stunted kikar trees amid which the camp was pitched. They could be heard also, since in the limited leisure at their disposal they were hubble-hubbling away at their hookahs conscientiously; the noise in its rhythmic, intermittent insistency seemed like a distant snore from the sleepy desert of sand that stretched away to the horizon on all sides.

"Of course," he went on, "you could hardly be expected to know—though really, my dear, you have all your mother's quickness of perception regarding people and places—but the mere fact of that goatherd fellow giving his name as Khesroo, and admitting he was low-caste, should have made you doubt his assertion. I confess I had little hope, for such knowledge as he professed to have is generally in the keeping of the priesthood only."

"But Jim was there—I mean Mr. Forrester," she began. Her father coughed uneasily.

"Because I call my personal assistant, whom I have known as a child, Jim, that is no reason, my dear Queenie, why you should contract the habit. I don't think your poor mother would have liked it. Besides, though he is an able young man—very much so, indeed, and when he

grows older will make an excellent officer—Mr. Forrester—ahem!" (he made a violent effort over the name) "has no genius for antiquities. He utterly fails, for instance, to realise the far-reaching importance—for it would, of course, alter the whole chronology of the Græco-Bactrian era—of my contention concerning what Hausmann and the German school generally venture to designate a post-Vicramaditya. Yet some day, I feel sure, the gold coin of which Kapala gives so exact a description in B.C. 200, with the date under the legend and a double profile on the obverse, will turn up, and then the point will be settled, even if I do not live to see it."

He was fairly off on his hobby and had risen to pace the tent, his hands behind his back. Many a time and oft she had listened to him patiently, almost eagerly, for the story of India's golden age always fired her imagination, but to-day she was thinking of other things—of her engagement for one, which she must break to him sooner or later. So she went up to him and tucked her arm into his coaxingly.

"You may, father. It might be found any day. Do you know, I believe you would give almost anything—even your daughter—for that ducat. Wouldn't you?"

Absolute jest as it was, her voice trembled over the trivial words, as voices often do unconsciously when Fate means to turn them to her own purposes.

He smiled and patted her hand. "Undoubtedly, I would, my dear. But, nice as you are, no one is likely to offer me that exchange. To begin with, the coin, as a simple unique, would be worth a fortune, and then there is the fame. Think of it! Half the philologists, most of the historians, and all those German fellows routed on their own ground!"

"Who knows?" she said, and then a frown dimmed the amusement in her eyes. "Though I can't understand," she added, "why that man Khesroo denied—as you say he did—having met Jim—I mean, us—yesterday. He can't be the wrong man, can he?"

"Mr. Forrester thinks he is not. But you can see for yourself," replied her father, returning to his tea and his

treasures, "for he is still over in the orderlies' tent. They had such trouble hunting him out of the jungles and persuading him to come here that they said they must keep him overnight, anyhow, in case he was wanted."

An hour or so afterwards, therefore, a yellow-legged constable escorted the goatherd who had answered to the name of Khesroo into the verandah of the Miss-Sahiba's drawing-room tent. It, also, was set wide to the cool of the desert evening, and its easy-chairs and low, flower-decked tables strewn with books and magazines struck a curiously dissonant note from that sounded by the wilderness of sandy waste which on all sides hemmed in the little square of white-winged camp with a certain hungry emptiness.

"He *is* the man, Jim," said the girl, in an undertone (for her father had come over from office and was seated within, reading the daily papers which the camel-post had just brought). "And yet—he looks different somehow—and so ill, too."

He did look ill, with the languid yet harassed air which follows on malarial fever. The buoyancy of his carriage was replaced by an almost dejected air. Yet it was unmistakably the goatherd they had met the evening before, who, in obedience to a sign, squatted down midway, as it were, between the culture inside the tent and the savagery without it.

"You look as if you had been having fever—have you?" asked the girl abruptly, for her years of authority had made her knowledgeable in such things.

"The malika sahiba says right," replied Khesroo, indifferently. "I have had it much—this long while back."

"And you had it yesterday or the day before?"

"It was yesterday. I was put past by it all day. And yet——" here a vague perplexity came to the dulled yet anxious face as he looked first at the girl, then apologetically at Jim Forrester. "What the Presence said about meeting me is perhaps right after all. Yes! it is right. I did see the Huzoor. I have remembered from the graciousness of the queen-lady and the gold crown of her hair."

The young Englishman frowned angrily. "You work

miracles in memory, my dear Queenie," he said, and there was quite an aggrieved tone in his voice as he turned shortly on the speaker. "Why on earth didn't you tell the truth before, then? And the old city? I suppose you remember all about that, too?"

"The old city," echoed Khesroo, doubtfully. "No, Huzoor! What should I know about it beyond what all know—that there was a city, and that it is lost? Such as I know only what the wise tell them——" he paused, and even to his deprecation came a half-resigned self-assertion, "And yet I had more chance than most, seeing that my mother was twice-born."

"She was, was she?" put in his hearer, and then looked round towards his chief. "Do you hear that, sir? His mother was a Brahmani—that may account for his profile, which you said this morning puzzled you in a low-caste man."

"I said it was Scythic in type, and so it is," was the answer, as the speaker laid down his paper and came forward for further inspection. "So your mother was twice-born," he continued, addressing the goatherd; "a child-widow, I suppose?"

Khesroo stretched his hand out, the fingers wide-spread in a dignified assent, which suited him better than his former almost cringing humility.

"Huzoor, yes! Her people, however, did not find her till I was nigh six; but after that, of course, I was alone."

A hush fell on the group, for—to those three listeners who understood them—the simple words told of a common enough tragedy in India; of a life denied all natural outlet, of unworthy love, of outraged pride of race followed by sure, if slow, revenge.

"And your father—who was he?"

Kresroo shook his head. "I had no one but my mother, Huzoor."

There was another hush, on which the girl's voice rose clear with a curious thrill in it.

"And she was very beautiful, was she not?"

"Her son is a good-looking fellow, at any rate," remarked Jim Forrester, coolly, and moving away, he took

up the newspaper, conscious of a certain irritation, and began to read the latest report of wireless telegraphy with the unsuspicious and unquestioning assent which we of these latter days reserve for the marvels of matter only.

Her father having gone back to his papers also, the girl and the goatherd were left alone midway between civilisation and savagery. Huddled in his coarse blanketing, his bare arms crossed over his bare knees, there was nothing distinctive or unusual in Khesroo's figure, behind which the background of shadowy desert was fast fading into shadowy sky, except the haggardness of the aquiline face, the hollowness of the dark eyes. These struck her, and she stretched out her hand to feel his.

"Have you fever now? No, you are quite cool."

He shivered slightly at her touch, and his eyes, passing hers, seemed to rest on the plaits of her hair.

"No, Huzoor," he replied, "it is a thief fever—it is hard to catch."

She smiled. "I think quinine will manage it."

He shook his head. "Nothing catches that which robs us of life at its own time. It will leave me none some day." He spoke unconcernedly, as if the fact were beyond question.

"Then why do you wear that amulet if it is of no use?" she said, pointing to the little leathern bag, such as the wild tribes use for the carrying of charms, which was tied round his arm.

Khesroo shook his head again, but smiled this time, and the flash of his white teeth must have removed any doubt of his identity, had such doubt existed.

"The queen-lady mistakes," he said. "It does not contain a charm. It is my *photongrar.*"

"Your what?" she echoed, uncomprehending.

"*Photongrar.* The picture, Huzoor, that the sun holds always of all things it has ever seen in the world. It showed this to a memsahiba long ago when I was little, and she showed it to my mother."

"You mean your photograph?"

"Huzoor, yes! Perhaps the queen-lady might care to

see it, since it is like my mother as she was—*before they found her!*"

Perhaps it was the thought of what the poor woman must have been like *after* that finding which made the English girl feel a vague oppression as she took the tight roll of paper that Khesroo unfolded from a piece of red rag.

"I was five, Huzoor," he said simply, "and my mother loved me much."

Small wonder, was the girl's first thought as she looked at the sedate, yet childish face, half-concealed by the high turban, which had evidently been borrowed for the occasion, at the quaint dignity of the childish figure huddled into finery too large for it, and holding a flower in its hand as if it had been a sceptre. But as she looked, a startled expression came over her face; she stood up and hurried to her father, with appeal in her voice.

"Oh, father! do look here! How very curious! This photograph of Khesroo when he was a child—I think mother must have taken it, for I am almost sure there is one like it in her diary—in the volume you gave me to read the other day, because we were camping through the same country. Stay! I'll fetch it——"

She was back in a moment with an unclasped book in her hand, and fluttered hastily through pages and sketches, almost to the end.

"There!" she cried, suddenly, "I was sure of it!"

Her father laid the one photograph beside the other, and Jim Forrester, looking over his shoulder curiously, compared them also. They were identical. But underneath the one pasted into the book a woman's hand had written:

"*The Son of a King!*"

The title fitted the picture, and reminded the girl of something in Khesroo which had struck her yesterday and which was absent to-day. She turned over the page, but beyond it all was blank. Those words were the last in the diary.

"I think I remember something about it now, my dear," said her father, taking his hand away from the book gently; "it may have been the last she took, for I was camping

round here as assistant just before—before you were born. And she was always taking children and giving pictures to the mothers; not that I remember that particular one—you see it must be fifteen years ago—at least."

"Nearer five-and-twenty, dear," she said, softly, and as she realised the impotence of what the world counts as time to touch the smallest thing that once has been, the utter irrelevance of days and weeks and years in connection with a single thought, the photographs before her grew dim to her eyes, the fine feminine writing with its verdict, "The Son of a King," became invisible.

So through her tears she saw only—blurred and indistinct—the wondering face of Khesroo the goatherd.

"Look!" she said, in sudden impulse. "The sun must have held two pictures of you."

He stared at the duplicate stupidly. "I did not steal it," he began, uneasily.

"Of course you didn't," she replied, smiling now. "It was my mother who took the picture, and gave it to yours—she was the mem-sahiba you spoke of—perhaps you remember her?"

A look almost of relief came to the goatherd's haggard, anxious face. "Yes! Perhaps your slave remembers, and that is why he thought he recollected the graciousness of the queen-lady and the gold crown of her hair. That will be it, and your slave did not lie to the Huzoor." He looked apologetically towards the young Englishman; but the latter had once more an aggrieved tone in his voice as he said shortly in English:

"Whether he did or did not doesn't much matter. There isn't anything to be got out of him apparently, so perhaps you had better tell the orderly to take him back to the tent and see that he takes the quinine you send—as I suppose you will."

III

"I meant to tell him yesterday, Jim," said the girl, in an undertone, glancing with almost maternal solicitude at her father, who was writing within, his grey, somewhat bald head shining out in the light of the lamp by which he was working, against the intense shadowy darkness of the tent walls, "but that disappointment about the lost city, wasn't, so to say, propitious. And to-day there was that letter from Hausmann about the coin somebody has discovered, which has quite upset him. Poor father," she added, turning to her lover again, "it will be hard on him. Did you notice how he said it was but fifteen years . . ."

She broke off and looked out into the night. The stars were showing overhead through the fine fret of the kikar trees, though the horizon still held a hint of the day that was dead. Against this paler background she fancied she could see—itself a shadow, yet half hidden by shadow—that curving dome as of a new world forcing its way through the crust of the old, or an old one through the new.

"It was odd about those photographs, wasn't it?" she said, irrelevantly. "He must be five years older than I am."

"His age is honoured by the comparison."

"My dear Jim," she interrupted, opening her eyes, "this unfortunate goatherd seems——"

"I said he was fortunate, I think. But I admit hating things I don't quite understand."

"Then you must hate me—now don't be angry," she added: "I mean no blame. I very often don't understand myself."

"I know that—and that is why I want this business settled and clear—you—you seem so far off sometimes."

There was a passion in his voice; he stretched his hands out to her as she stood apart, her filmy dinner dress looking ghostly and elusive seen half in the dark, half by the feeble light from within the tent.

She stretched out her hands also, but there was all

the world between his almost pathetic appeal and her almost amused repulse.

"You must make haste and find the ducat, Jim. I feel sure that without it—and especially in his present mood—father will never consent——"

He certainly did not seem in a consenting frame of mind as he came out to them with the offending letter from Hausmann in his hand.

"I've answered it," he said, sternly, "but as the man is an ass, he will most likely miss the point, which is, of course, Kapala's description of this coin. He says distinctly that it has one profile superimposed on another with the legend beneath, and the date below the flower on the obverse. Really, child, I think I will get you to figure it for me, since Hausmann seems unable to understand words."

"You could use the handsome goatherd as a model, you know," remarked Jim Forrester, vaguely surprised at his own irritation; "your father said his features were Scythic."

"Yes!" assented the numismatist, abstractedly, as he tried to re-read part of the offending missive by the distant light of the lamp; "rather an uncommon type in India, nowadays, though one sees it elsewhere. Queenie has it partly—your mother had Russian blood in her, you know."

"Perhaps that is why I feel so interested in Khesroo," said the girl, looking coldly askance at her lover.

"Oh, by the way," put in her father, breaking in on his own indignation and the silence which ensued between those two who loved each other—a silence which both felt to be at once incomprehensible yet inevitable, intolerable yet in a way fascinating—"that reminds me. The orderlies reported he was bad with fever to-night. Send him over some more quinine."

"I'll take it, if you like," said Jim Forrester, faintly penitent.

She looked at the two men with disdainful tolerance. "I will see him first. One never knows what these people call fever—it may be pneumonia."

She moved off as she spoke, into the night, meaning to cross over towards the orderlies' tent, then paused to

glance back at the figure which followed. "Are you coming, too?" she said, curtly. "I can manage all right."

"Of course I am coming!" replied Jim Forrester. "It is pitch dark, to begin with, and I can at least help you to find your patient. I think you had better keep outside the camp, so as to avoid the tent-ropes—it isn't any longer, really."

It was, if anything, shorter, but it brought them instantly into the grip, as it were, of the desert, which crept hungrily upon the camp on all sides; so that, ere they had gone five steps beyond the canvas wings of the tent, they seemed as much alone, as far from conventional twentieth-century life, as they had been two days before, when they first sat together as betrothed lovers in the sunset of a world of curves telling the tale of eternal, of unseen circlings. Even so much of Life's secret was invisible now. All they saw was a darkness they knew to be wilderness, a dim outline of themselves, close together, hand in hand. For with the knowledge that they were alone—perhaps with the memory of the wilderness—they had clasped hands instinctively, and for the time the sense of stress and strain had passed.

It returned again, however, with curious vividness, as, right in their path, a shadow, dim as their own, showed suddenly.

She knew who it was instinctively before it spoke.

"I thought you had fever," she said. "Why are you here?"

"I have been waiting the graciousness of the queen-lady," came the reply, and the voice was buoyant with joyous vitality. "I have to tell her my dreams—the fever always brings dreams, and I remember now! Yea! I remember all things from the beginning. So, if she will come, I will show her the lost city where we lived, and she will dream the dream also."

Dimly, in the darkness, she fancied she could see the shining of his eyes, see his beckoning hand. What her lover saw was a movement of the shadow towards the wilderness: what he felt was a faint increase in the distance between his hand and hers which made him claim it again.

"Queenie!" he cried, "what are you thinking of? You can't possibly go now. The man is delirious with fever—surely you hear that in his voice. You had better come back to the tent and let me send someone to take him into shelter and look after him."

For an instant no one spoke, and then it seemed almost a bodiless voice from the desert which broke the silence, for in his desire to detain her, Jim Forrester had drawn the girl back a pace or two, so that the darkness lay deeper between their two shadows and that third one nearer the wilderness.

"Let the queen-lady decide for herself. If she comes, I will show her all forgotten things—the golden crown that is not plaited hair, the golden coin that was made for the lovers——"

"Jim," she whispered, almost fiercely, "do you hear? It is the gold coin—it is waiting to be found. I must go——"

"This is pure folly," protested the young Englishman. "If anyone has to go, I will, of course. But what hurry is there? Why not wait till to-morrow—now, do be reasonable, Queenie, and consider——"

She ceased trying to release her hand, and when she spoke again it was in a natural tone.

"Yes. I forgot that. Khesroo, I will come with you to-morrow. It will be easier by daylight. Go back to the orderlies' tent now, and I will send you over some more medicine, and when the fever has gone——"

"The dreams will have gone, too," came the voice out of the night; but it, also, was more natural, more like that of Khesroo the goatherd. "I shall forget again, and then the gold coin that was struck for her and her lover——"

"For her and her lover," echoed the girl, softly. "Did you hear, Jim? I must go and get it for you."

"Long—long ago——" came the voice again.

She echoed the words almost inaudibly this time, and Jim Forrester drew her closer as he said sharply: "If anyone goes, I will; but I don't see——"

The voice interrupted him. "But the queen-lady sees. She is like her mother; she sees pictures in the sun. Of

course, the Huzoor can come; but if the queen-lady really wants this thing—if she believes—if she trusts——"

"Let me go, Jim! let me go!"

"You shall not," he cried, seizing her round the waist in swift antagonism to some unseen influence, in sudden consciousness of conflict.

And so to both him and her in the darkness and stillness of the desert, within a few steps only of quiet, comfortable, commonplace civilisation, came like a whirlwind a perfect tumult of bewildering emotions, and all the deathless forces which never slumber or sleep in their work of moulding the soul of man, leapt from silence into speech. Love, jealousy, hatred, resolve, high courage—all these seemed to sweep through their every fibre of mind and body, leaving them breathless, wondering, uncertain if they were awake or dreaming, if they were real or mere shadows of a reality which Time cannot touch or alter. For an instant only they were conscious of all this—but the instant might have been an hour in its suggestion of infinite experience.

Then Time claimed them once more, time and trivialities and commonsense, so that ten minutes afterwards, Jim Forrester, having made his preparations for a tramp into the desert, was stooping to say good-night to his betrothed and to assure her of his speedy return. The moon would rise in half-an-hour, the distance to the place where they had first met Khesroo could not be over three miles, he would be back by midnight.

Meanwhile, she could tell her father he had turned in, but if she chose herself to sit up—well . . .

As their lips met lingeringly, a little breeze that had wandered from the desert shifted a ripple or two on the sand-waves about their feet, and died away like a sigh in the fine fret of the kikar trees above the unseen tents.

IV

It was an hour before dawn.

The desert itself could scarcely have been stiller than the camp. In the white moonlight the white tents looked like some shrouded city of the dead, forgotten yet unburied; for, here and there, some out in the moonlit open, other flecked with the fine shadow of the kikar trees, lay corpse-like figures swathed in sheets, as if waiting for their graves. There was no sound, no sign of life, not even where the moonlight, slanting through the still, wide-set wings of the drawing-room tent, showed the folds of a woman's dress, the daintiness of a high-heeled shoe.

The rest of the figure was in shadow, though the light, in its last effort against the darkness of the tent, claimed the pages of the open book which lay on the sleeping girl's lap, and turned one of them into a silver framing for the photograph of a child. So vivid was the light that even the fine feminine writing beneath it showed in the dead woman's verdict:

"The Son of a King!"

For the girl had been pondering over the strange chance which had brought her, in her turn, within the influence of this nameless kingship when, as she waited for her lover's return, she had fallen asleep in her chair. And yet, as she had sat there, thinking, watching, she had felt very wide awake indeed. Not with anxiety, however; that had passed. In fact, as she followed in her mind what had gone before Jim Forrester's quite prosaic start to walk three or four miles into the wilderness on a moonlight night to be shown the bearings of a buried city and possibly to be given proof positive that there were ruins beneath the sand, she had been in grave doubt as to what had actually occurred. Had there been conflict? Had love and jealousy and hatred and resolve risen up and claimed them all? Surely not. Why, indeed, should it be so? Though, doubtless, in her, in her lover, in the goatherd, there was something held, as it were, in common, yet which had struggled to be individual, separate.

And this had been most marked between the young

Englishman and the goatherd. Unaccountable as it was, she felt that in some mysterious fundamental mind of hers these two were associated indissolubly—that they stood towards her on the same plane. Nay, more! that it was the consciousness of this which kept her calm, which overbore the possibility of future danger, the memory of past conflict. What harm could happen to the Son of a King or with the Son of a King?

The phrase had been on her lips as she fell asleep. It was on them as she awoke and stood up suddenly, the open book sliding soundless from her lap into the soft sand. But the phrase brought no comfort with it now. Had she been asleep for long? Had her lover returned? Was it past midnight?

The anxious questions surged up through the crust of calm before she was half awake, and instinctively she was outside the tent in a moment on her way towards her lover's, her rapid feet, shod in the dainty high-heeled slippers, dimpling the shifting sand.

The coming dawn had sent cloud heralds to the west, and an advanced pursuivant, drifting across the moon, shadowed all things faintly and seemed to increase the silence.

She called softly; there was no reply, so she looked in. A glance told her that her lover had not returned, and the light stealing in through the uplifted screen showed her by the travelling-clock hung to the tent-pole that it was already past three o'clock.

Three! What had happened—and what was to be done? For an instant the ordinary inrush of anxiety made her think of rousing the camp, of sending out search-parties; but the next brought her a curious conviction that in this case danger lay in seeking outside help: a certainty that in this matter she must stand alone, that in this crisis—whatever it was—there must be but three alone—if, indeed, there were three—herself, her lover, and this nameless Son of a King.

So, almost without a pause, the dimples left by her rapid feet were curving towards the highest sand-wave within sight of the camp. Thence she could watch the

desert sea, and perhaps find him, even now, close at hand. But once there, the next sand-wave attracted her as being a better point of vantage, and so from wave to wave she flitted in her white dress like some desert bird, leaving behind her a curved track of dimples in the sliding sand, until a little wind, the herald blast of the hurrying clouds overhead, crept low down over the world and swept the dimples back into the old ripples.

"Khesroo!" she called, suddenly, for a shadow seemed beside hers in that empty wilderness; but there was no answer.

"Jim!" she called again, uncertainly; but there was no reply. Yet she was not frightened. She knew now, in that mysterious fundamental mind of hers, that she alone was responsible, that she, and she only, could solve the riddle. Khesroo had been right. If she wanted this thing, if she had believed, if she had trusted, she would have gone before. And now she must hurry, or it would be too late —wherefore or for what she scarcely considered.

"Khesroo!" she called once more, and this time there was a faint inflection of fear in her voice; for was that figure Khesroo, the goatherd, or was it her lover? Or was it neither; but someone only of whom she had dreamt as the Son of a King?

Should she go back? The wish struck her keenly, but she ignored it, and went on. She must, she knew, have left the camp far behind her, and, if she had kept the right direction, would soon be close on the spot where that straight line of an arrow had startled her by its intrusion into her dream of love.

If she had kept it! And surely she had, for behind her the east was faintly lightening with the dawn. Yonder, therefore, in the dark of the heralding clouds which had huddled upon the western horizon must lie the domed shadows of the buried city.

"Khesroo!" she cried, instinctively, the very soul of her speaking, "show it to me! For the sake of the woman who died, as women die for a life of love, a love of life, show it to me!"

And then, behind her, she heard a voice chanting, as

Khesroo, the goatherd, had chanted, the call of guidance for the wanderers in the desert. Yet the words were different; for these were they:

"Seekers for sleep, arise!
Your rest is done.
Go forth with weary eyes
To find your prize
In vain, in vain! To none
Will slumber have begun
Till from the heart of one
Desire dies."

Listening, she turned to look, then realised that in her searching she must once more have circled back on her own footsteps, for behind and not before her, dark, clear, unmistakable, the domed shadow of the lost city lay against the lightening east. And on its swelling side, as Khesroo had stood before, he stood again. Was it the rising sun which turned the fillet of knotted cord about his head to gold?—which dyed the coarse blanketing to royal purple, and transformed the wearer into the perfect kingliness of buoyant youth and beauty? She never knew. She only felt that something stronger than herself caught her, held her, clasped her, and yet drew her on, so that with hands outstretched she ran towards it, crying between smiles and tears:

"The Son of a King! The Son of a King!"

The next instant she had tripped and fallen heavily on her face over a tangled tuft of grass concealing an unusually deep descent of a desert wave. As she picked herself up, confused, somewhat dazed, and paused to free her eyes from the sand grains which clouded them, something almost at her feet brought her back to realities, and she gave a quick exclamation. For in the hollow beneath the wave, where he had evidently sought shelter deliberately, Jim Forrester lay curled up comfortably, fast asleep. At least, so it seemed, though Khesroo's quaint old bow must surely make rather an uncomfortable pillow.

She stooped over the sleeping man, and for an instant her face whitened; she bent lower to listen to his breathing. And as she listened a couple of startled sand-chaffs fled from a neighbouring thorn bush, their chuckling cry echoing over the desert like an evil laugh.

But a minute afterwards, in answer to her touch, Jim Forrester was staring at her trying to collect his sleep-scattered senses.

"Hullo!" he said, slowly. "How on earth did I—Ah! I remember. That brute of a goatherd played the garden ass and I lost him, so after wandering about for hours, I turned in till daylight. But you—my dearest dear——"

He started to his feet as he realised her presence there, and held out both his hands to her.

As he did so, something dropped from them and lay glittering on the sand at his feet. It was a gold coin.

They looked at each other, amazed; then she stooped and picked it up.

"A double profile," she said slowly, holding it so as to catch the growing sunlight, "and the legend round"—she spelt it out from the Greek lettering—"'Basileus Basileon.'"

"And the date," he cried, "the date!"

"Yes, the date is there," she replied, still more slowly turning to the obverse, "the bird and the date—it is all right—but I was thinking of the other——"

"What other?"

"Basileus Basileon—'the King of Kings,'" she said softly, and looked out towards the sunrise. But the light had claimed the whole world and sent all shadows flying.

So happily, prosaically, they went home to breakfast. Yet there was one thing which she never told anyone, perhaps because it might have stood in the way of the popular explanation of the whole affair—namely, that Khesroo had happened on the coin and must have put it in Jim Forrester's hand after the latter fell asleep. So, not even when her father proudly pointed out to admirers that the double profile was that of a man and a woman, and that the latter, curiously enough, might almost be a portrait of his married daughter, did she ever say that when she found her husband asleep in the sand that morning, the looped bowstring of Khesroo the goatherd's bow was loose about his neck.

But she often wonders if it would have been drawn tighter had she not gone to seek for what she wanted.

THE BIRTH OF FIRE

The night was clear and silent.

The light-pulse of the stars as they wheeled with slow certainty to meet the dawn was the only visible movement in the whole expanse of shadowed earth and sky.

And the only sound audible was my own life breath as I sate beside the glowing embers of the camp fire.

Strictly speaking, however, there was no camp, for I, and the two coolies who carried my breakfast, had missed our way in our detour through the eternal sameness of faint curve and level in the wide uplands, and finally, in despair of rejoining our tents, had bivouacked as best we could on the shore of a small frozen lake; one of those obstinate, rock-bound pools which, even when spring has set seal of conquest on the world, refuse to melt, and so yield up their treasure of sweet water to its renewed thirst for Life.

My servants had forced this particular lakelet to philanthropy with rude blows; wantonly rude it had seemed to me, as I watched the swift shiver with which the stable unity of surface had split into forlorn fragments of ice, each adrift at the mercy of that which they had held prisoner for so long.

The other necessary element, fire, my men had also commandeered by a raid on the low juniper which crept like moss below the taller grasses of the plain.

The result had not been altogether satisfactory, for the pungent smoke of the aromatic wood had—at least, so the sufferers averred, though, at the time, I suspected a recourse for comfort to my whisky-flask—produced unmistakable symptoms of intoxication in the amateur cooks, who, after valiantly serving me up a réchauffé of breakfast had succumbed to sleep. The mattress of creeping juniper on which they lay like logs was springy enough to have hidden them from sight even if the shadowed earth had not been

so dark; for it *was* dark, formless, void, as only an unbroken expanse of featureless plain can be when the very sky grows velvet black because of the infinitely distant brilliance of the stars. Indeed, the uniformity of indefinable shadow was almost oppressive, although I knew right well the scene that lay around me; for who that has once seen it can fail of seeing again with the mind's eye the marvellous mosaic as of white marble and precious jewels which covers the high upland stretches of the World's Roof, when the winter snow retreats reluctantly, as if loth to leave the carpeting of spring flowers which follow on its fleeing footsteps.

I even remembered as I watched the embers that just behind them, finding faint shelter from a solitary boulder, there grew a tiny azalea I had never seen before; a fragile, leafless thing set sparsely with sweet-scented flowers that were flecked rose on saffron like a sunset sky.

And the silence was oppressive also. I caught myself listening—listening almost breathlessly—for a sound—for some sound! But there was not even a whisper among the tall grasses.

In sudden impulse I threw a fresh juniper branch upon the embers, and the silence, the stillness ended as if by magic; for the green spines spat and sputtered as they shrivelled, and sent out a dense cloud of smoke to circle up endlessly into the darkness.

A pungent smoke indeed! Involuntarily I drew back from it and covered my eyes with my hand waiting until the smouldering should lighten into flame.

The waiting, however, prolonged itself strangely. No flicker of light reached me, and I began to wonder dreamily what had happened; so dreamily, indeed, that when at last I looked up, I did so reluctantly, and with a curious sense of confusion.

It was this, no doubt, which prevented surprise at finding that I was no longer the solitary watcher of those dull embers.

Opposite me, nearly hidden in the endless curlings of the juniper smoke was a man crouching towards the fire as if he felt the cold of the high uplands. Only his face, and the hands he held towards the heat, showed clearly;

the rest was lost in billowy clouds which, drifting upwards behind him, obscured the very stars.

I sate silent for a while, disinclined even for curiosity, and then, rather to my own surprise, I spoke as I might have spoken to a familiar friend.

"You are cold, I'm afraid."

To this day, I do not know in what language he replied—if, indeed! he spoke at all. My only recollection is of the eloquence of liquid, lustrous eyes, the confident certainty of comprehension which is the child's ere it can speak articulately.

"I am a Star-gazer; so the Fire draws me."

"Why?"

"Why? Surely all know it is the Star Fire which fell when She first came to me—Hai-me! Hai-me! When She first came and laid her hand in mine."

The drifting billows parted, showing the stars above his head, then closed again, blotting them out; blotting out all things, it seemed to me, even my own self as I sate listening to the faint wail which rose vaguely, filling the wide shadows.

"Io! Io! Disturber of dreams, why didst thou come? Io! Io! Bringer of dreams, why didst go? Lo! the Star fire was not thine though thou camest with the Fire of the Star."

Through the pungent aroma of the burning branches, a faint breath of perfume from the sunset-dyed azalea swept, mingling with it, and so passing with it into the endless circling.

The lustrous eyes drooped, losing their brilliance; but when they looked up again only serene confident comprehension was there.

"In forest days none of us were Star-gazers, for there was no Rim to the world on which the following Footsteps could be seen. But when we left the forest for the upland, with its milch kine and seed grains, we learnt to look; for there was the Rim. And all things went to stand on it and disappear among the Stars.

"So, gazing, we saw that the Stars disappeared also; they, too, were following the Footsteps. But they never

came back as they went, like other things. Their footsteps were faithful; so faithful that you could foretell by them the ripening of the seed grains, the coming of milk to the herds.

"So gazing, we wondered. Here by this pool I watched, taking no need of harvest or milk time; but I saw nothing but the following Footsteps and the footsteps of the Stars.

"Nothing, though I followed with mine eyes, wheeling as the Stars wheeled to meet the dawn while the shadows and my kind, and all other things, slept as they do now."

They slept, indeed! The very smoke had ceased to circle. It hung in motionless curves, soft, impenetrable, and I could see nothing now save the lustrous eyes, and the dull glow of the fire.

"So I gazed, until one night, as I stood following the footsteps of the faithful Stars with mine eyes, the knowledge came to me, that as I stood watching them, so Someone stood watching me and all things. Someone who did not move. And I was glad, though I was afraid.

"But that dawn, when I went down after our custom to gather the seed grains with my kind, they looked at me askance as if I were a stranger. Only Io, she of the beautiful young one that all cherished, paused as she suckled it to follow me with curious wondering eyes."

There was a pause, and through it came, soft as a sigh, that faint wail:

"Io! Io! Disturber of Dreams, why didst come? Io! Io! Bringer of Dreams, why didst thou go?"

"It was cold here, on the uplands, gazing; but the faithful Stars shone quite near me. It seemed as if I could reach up and clasp them. And I was faithful as they in the Footsteps; for I have driven a stake of wood into the ground firm as the ground itself, and night after night, as I watched the Stars wheel, I twirled the slender wand I held in my hands upon it, following their faithful Footsteps so that the Someone who watched might see me even as they were!

"And I was happy, though I was afraid.

"But one night, when the tall grasses were stiff and the low green things were white with the cold, my fingers

could scarce twirl the wand, and the fear lest the Someone might grow angry with me came so strong that suddenly I lifted my head and cried to It to be kind.

"How the stars shone! My hands longed to leave the wand and reach them, and in me there rose a great new joy, as if I had found myself.

"But that Dawn, when I went after the custom to gather the grain with my kind, they fled from me as if I had been an enemy.

"Only Io, she of the beautiful young one, with her breasts full of milk, left the cherished one athirst to follow my footsteps and hold out a handful of the grain she had gathered for herself.

"But I feared her and she feared me, so she left it lying on the ground, and afterwards I went and ate it, for I was hungry. But the touch of her hand that was on the grain touched my lips so that I felt it even as I gazed.

"Io! Io! Disturber of Dreams, why didst come? Io! Io! Why didst thou go? The Star fire was not thine, though thou wast in the fire of the Star!"

Even the lustrous eyes were hidden from me now; I saw nothing but the fading glow of the embers as I sate listening amid the uttermost peace of all things to that soft almost voiceless wail.

"The nights grew hot, and the tall grasses crackled in the drought, and the low green things wilted to greyness. But I cared not, for I had found myself, and I knew there was a Beginning and an End. And even that touch on my lips did not disturb my dreams as, faithful as they, I followed the faithful footsteps of the Stars.

"Until one night—it was so hot that something in me seemed to out-beat the beating of the Stars—a great Darkness that was not Night came from the Rim and swallowed up all things.

"I had seen it come before and had hidden my face from it like the rest of my kin, but now my fear was too strong for hiding. Besides, who could hide when Someone watched always? And why should I hide if I were faithful—if I were as the Stars?

"Thus a great joy mingled with my fear, until something

in me cried out with a great longing for something that was not in me, and something that I had not, seemed to come to me until my wand twirled faster, as if other hands were on it, and my lips, as I cried out that I was faithful, felt the touch of other lips upon them.

"So through the Darkness that hid the Stars while the hot wind howled about me and flung hot earth grains in my face, I shouted to the Stars to come down to me."

The very fire had gone now, and I strained my eyes into the shadows, seeing nothing but endless curves as of smoke.

"And lo! One came!

"Just where the wand whirled by my hot hasty hands touched the steady stake of wood I saw a tiny star.

"But, as I saw it, something came to me also, making me forget the Star!

"It was Io!

"She had left her cherished one; with her breasts full of milk, she had left the little drinker athirst; she had followed my footsteps through the darkness to find me and lay her hand in mine.

"Io! Io! Bringer of Dreams! Io! Io! Disturber of Dreams, thou didst come!

"And the touch of our hands and our lips together made us forget the starshine which had come with it.

"But the shine grew and grew, so that when we looked again it was not a Star at all, but something new and strange. Something that crept among the dry grasses and the wilted green things, something that leaped and laughed amid the darkness, something that sent hot arms towards us, till I caught her in mine and fled from it, leaving the wand and the steady stake behind.

"So we fled and fled, with the Fire which came from the Starshine behind us always. Fled in the faithful footsteps of the Stars. . . . Fled to find the Dawn! . . ."

* * * * *

There was silence; a long silence! And was that the Dawn, the gracious Dawn?

Something, surely, all rose flecked on saffron and suffused with Light lay before my upturned eyes.

It was an azalea blossom. But, as I rose to my feet from the springy juniper where I had been lying, my head sheltered by the straggling branches of the leafless bush, the dawn had come, indeed, on the far rim of the wide plain.

And between it and me, rising from the retreating snow and the carpeting of spring flowers, was a white vapour which, lit by the rosy sun rays behind it, showed like smoke from a prairie fire.

But our fire was out. Only a heap of grey ashes remained, though the sleep which had come from the juniper branches still held the sleeping servants.

It needed a rough awakening, as rough as that which had left the prisoning ice at the mercy of the prisoned water, to rouse them and make them stand yawning, stretching in the dawn, avowing that *haschish* itself could not bring wilder dreams than those which had been theirs that night. But was it a dream? or does the man, hand-in-hand with the woman, still fly from the Fire which came from the Star-shine?

THE GIFT OF BATTLE

"Then you recommend them both," said the mild little Commissioner, doubtfully; he was a vacillating man, by nature lawful prey to his superiors.

Tim O'Brien, C.I.E.—the uncoveted distinction had been, to his great disgust, bestowed on him after a recent famine, in which his sheer vitality had saved half a province, and earned him, rightfully, the highest honour of the empire—removed his long Burmah cheroot from his lips and smiled brilliantly. He was a thin brown man with a whimsical face.

"And what would I be doing with wan of them on the Bench and the other in the dock? For it would be that way ere a week was past. It is very kind of the L.G. to suggest putting either Sirdar Bikrama Singh or Khân Buktiyar Khân on the Honorary Magistracy, but he doesn't grasp that they are hereditary enemies and have been the same for eight hundred years. Ever since the Pathans temporarily conquered the Rajputs, in the year av' grace 1256! So you couldn't in conscience expect wan of them not to commit a crime if the other was to be preferred before him. Ye see, he'd just have to kill someone. But, if ye appoint them both, the dacencies of Court procedure and the hair-splittin' formalities of the local Bar will conduce to dignity—to say nothing of their own sense of justice, which, I'll go bail, is stronger than it is in most people ye could appoint. Equity's apt to go by the board if ye've too much legal knowledge; and they have none of that last. But I'll give them a good Clerk of the Court and guarantee they come to no harrm. Yes, sir, I recommend them both—to sit *in banco.*"

When Tim O'Brien spoke, as he did in the last sentence, curtly and without a trace of his usual rollicking Irish accent, his superior officers invariably fell in with his views; it saved trouble.

So, in due course, what answers to a J.P.'s commission at home (with no small extra powers thrown in) was sent to Sirdar Bikrama Singh, Rajput at his castle of Nagadrug (the Snake's Hole), and also to Khân Buktiyar Khân at his fortress of Shakingarh (the Falcon's Nest).

Both buildings had been for some centuries in a hopeless state of dilapidation, as, from a worldly point of view, were their owners' fortunes. But, just as the crumbling walls still commanded the wide arid valley which lay between the rocky steeps of the sandhills on which they stood, so the position of the two most ancient families of Hindus and Mahomedans in the district still commanded the respect of the whole sub-division. Of course, they were antagonistic. Had they not been so always? But, in truth, the old story of how they came to be so was such a very old story, that none knew the rights of it: not even the two high-nosed, high-couraged old men, who, having in due time succeeded to the headship of their respective families, had done as their fathers had done; that is to say, glared at each other over their barren fields, formulated every possible complaint they could against their neighbour, and denied any good quality to him, his house, his wife, his oxen, or his ass.

Yet the two had one thing in common. They were both soldiers by race. Their sons were even now with the colours of Empire, and in their own youth both had served John Company, and afterwards, the Queen. This bond, however, was not one of union, but rather of discord. For the one had belonged to the crack Hindu and the other to the crack Mahomedan corps of the Indian army, and their respective sons naturally followed in their fathers' footsteps. Indeed, on occasions the pair of dear old pantaloons would appear in the uniforms of a past day, hopelessly out of date as regards buttons and tailoring, but still worn with the distinctive cock of the turban and swagger of high boots that had belonged of old days and still belonged to the "rigimint."

Bikrama Singh was seated on the flat roof which had sheltered him and his for centuries when he received the little slip of silk paper, so beautifully engrossed, which

appointed him to the Honorary Magistracy. It was a barren honour, since he was not one of those—and there are many—who make a stipend out of an unpaid post; but his thin old fingers trembled a little and his eye lost the faintly blue film which age draws between the Real and the Unreal. Whether his mind reverted at once to his hereditary enemy—who was not mentioned in the paper—is doubtful, but he felt it to be an honour in these miserable days, when a moneylender had more chance of being elected to a district council than a gentleman of parts to be chosen by the Sirkar. It was a thousand times better than being "puffed by rabble votes to wisdom's chair."

"It is well," he said simply, but with a superior air, to his womenfolk—the wife and daughters and grand-daughters and daughters-in-law and their kind who filled up the wide old house. "I shall do my duty and punish the evil doer; notably those who do evil to my people and my land, since true justice begins at home." And he curled his thin grey moustache to meet his short grey whiskers and looked fierce as an old tiger.

Over in Shakingarh also the commission met with approval. "It is well!" said Buktiyar Khân, as he sate amongst his crowding womenfolk with a poultice of leaves on his short beard to dye it purple. "I shall do my duty and punish the evil doer; notably him who has done evil to my people and my land, since that is the beginning of justice." And his hawk's eye travelled almost unconsciously from his flat roof to that other one far over the valley.

Yet, when they met, a few days afterwards, duly attired in their uniforms on the threshold of *Brine sahib's* verandah, whither they had repaired full of courteous acknowledgments to one whom they recognised as being at the bottom of the appointment, a faint frown came to their old faces. But *Brine sahib* broke it to them gently, with the graceful tact which gained him so much confidence. Government, recognising their many and great excellencies, had found it impossible to do otherwise than elevate them both to the Bench, where they would doubtless remain, as they

were now, the best representatives of Hindu and Mahomedan feeling in the district. And then Tim O'Brien made a few remarks about the King-Emperor and devoted service which sent both old hands out in swift stiff salute.

Doubtless it was a shock to find themselves equally honoured; but regarding the "*in banco*," they both admitted instantly to themselves that it was better to sit next a hereditary enemy than a stinking scrivener or a mean moneylender. So Bikrama Singh twirled his grey moustache and said, "It is well," and Buktiyar Khân twirled his purple one and said the same thing.

Thereinafter they began work. The women of both houses made the first court day a regular festival, and sent the two old men from home dressed and scented and decorated as if for a bridal. The purple of Buktiyar's beard was positively regal, while the points of Bikrama's thin trembling fingers were rosy as the dawn.

They were fearsomely stately with each other, of course, but that only added to the dignity of the Bench. An excellent Clerk of the Court had been provided for them, and their first cases had been carefully chosen by Tim O'Brien for their simplicity.

Thus there had seemed no possibility of friction; yet the two new judges returned to their womenkind vaguely dissatisfied, dimly uneasy.

"The Mahomedan is no fool," remarked Bikrama Singh thoughtfully, "he saw as quickly as I did that truth lay with the defendant, lies with the plaintiff."

"By God's truth," admitted Buktiyar Khân grudgingly, "the Hindu is not such a blockhead as I deemed him. He saw as quickly as I did that lies were with the plaintiff, truth with the defendant."

It was almost intolerable; but it was true. The hereditary enemies had agreed about something on God's earth. And as time went on this unanimity of opinion became the most salient feature of the newly-constituted court. They agreed about everything. Of different race, different religion, something deeper in them than these surface variations coincided. Their innate sense of justice, fostered by the fact that they had both been brought up

in the India of the past, that they represented its laws, its morals, its maxims, made their judgments identical.

"We waste time, *babu-jee*," broke in old Bikrama Singh on the lengthy peroration of a newly passed pleader, eager to air his eloquence. "Words are idle when facts stare you in the face. 'Who knows is silent, he who talks knows not,' as the proverb hath it. That is enough. We are satisfied." "*Wâh Wâh*," assented Buktiyar Khân at once, acquiescent and regretful. "Truly, pleader-jee! thou hast said that before. Why say it again? If sugar kills, why try poison? We are satisfied, so that is enough."

It was more than enough for the local Bar. They went in a body to Tim O'Brien and complained that they were not treated as lawyers should be treated.

As usual, *Brine sahib* met them with sympathy; but it was the sympathy of inaction.

"I sincerely regret, gentlemen," he said softly, "that sufficient toime is not allowed you to get all the words you have at command off your stomachs—I beg pardon, your minds. But, ye see, the judgments of the Bench are unfortunately quite sound; they'd be watertight against the full forensic flood of the whole High Court Bar. So I don't see what the divvle is to be done—do you?"

They did not. In sober truth the sense of equity in the hereditary enemies was too strong for the lawyers. The old men were honestly fulfilled with the desire of punishing the evil doer and praising those who did well. Such flimsy overlays as race and tribe and caste and family and creed did not touch their agreement on all things necessary to salvation.

The fact was rather a pain and grief to them. It did not make them treat each other with less stately dignity or cause them to be one whit more friendly out of court.

Sirdar Bikrama Singh went home to his womenfolk and railed as ever against his neighbour, and Khân Buktiyar Khân, as he rolled his little opium pill betwixt finger and thumb, would do the same thing. But in their heart of hearts they knew that, since a judge must always be "an ignorant man between two wise ones" (the plaintiff

and defendant), it must be some common ground in themselves which made their views coincide.

Meanwhile the fame of the collective wisdom grew amongst the litigants, and indignation at its brevity increased amongst the lawyers. Tim O'Brien, however, when the timid little Commissioner showed him a numerously signed petition from the local Bar protesting against the "strictly non-regulation curtailment of eloquence," only smiled suavely. "They get at the rights of a case by congenital intuition, sir. The High Court have upheld their judgments in the few appeals the pleaders have cared to make; so I don't see what the div—— I mean, sir, I don't see what is to be done—do you?"

Once again there was no answer, and Tim O'Brien, as he dashed off here and there to institute enquiries in obedience to the cipher telegrams which came pouring in from Calcutta by day and by night, felt comfort in knowing that one sub-division of his district at any rate was being well administered.

For they were troublous days for officers in charge. Someone somewhere had been unwise enough to take the thumb-marks of a peripatetic preacher who was suspected of being an anarchist. He was proved to be an apostle of unrest; he was also unfortunately a man not only of thumb-mark, but of mark. A professor, briefly, in some far-away college. So the official who had ordered the indignity in the interests of public order was degraded; and thereinafter, naturally, began a campaign of would-be terrorism amongst the schoolboys and students of the province which shattered the nerves of government.

"By the Lord who made me," ejaculated Tim O'Brien angrily, as he flung aside the last urgent *communiquée* from headquarters, "one would think from that bosh, we were in danger of losing India to-morrow. Can't they see it's only schoolboy rot, sheer daredevil schoolboy mischief, like throwing caps under a motor car and heads you win tails I lose, you're over last. I'll tell you what it is, Smith," —here he addressed his assistant, a pale-faced boy not yet recovered from the strain of examinations—"if I was worth my salt and had the courage of my opinions, I'd have up

those boys' masters and give 'em each thirty with the cane for not keeping their pupils in order. That 'ud stop it. Instead of that, I have to arrest a poor child of thirteen who threw a badly made bomb, as harmless—it turned out—as a squib. However! my pension stares me in the face. There isn't even a House of Lords left to which I could appeal. So here goes for the innocent victim av' education! Inspector! arrange the arrest, please!"

Naturally, of course, as Tim O'Brien had known, every other schoolboy in the district marched about singing patriotic songs and doing wanton mischief to their hearts' content; thus there was quite a crop of minor arrests.

In fact, when the Bench of Hereditary Enemies held its next sitting it was confronted with a lengthy police case against a gang of boys whose ages varied from ten to thirteen.

Bikrama Singh listened gravely to the details and twirled his grey moustache. Buktiyar Khân also listened gravely and stroked his purple beard. They listened very patiently, yet a vague impatience came to their old faces. Then they looked in each other's eyes, and at last the wisdom of their hearts found speech.

"Where is the teacher of these children? Bring him hither that he may show cause for himself."

To be brief. That night the head master of the sub-divisional school could neither sit down nor stand up comfortably. But the streets were quiet; the boys peacefully in their beds.

"Glory be to them," cried Tim O'Brien exultantly, when the news was brought to him. "They've more spunk than I have—so now to get them out of the scrape."

He did his best, and that was a good deal, but the law and lies were against him. The schoolmaster happened to be somebody's nephew by marriage, and though there was ample evidence to prove that he had misused his position as a Government servant, the utmost favour Tim O'Brien could screw out of the Powers was permission for the offenders to retire instead of being dismissed from the Honorary Magistracy.

He broke this to the old men with his usual tact,

applauding them between the lines for their courage. To his surprise and relief they accepted the position calmly. The better the subordinate, they said, the less likely he was to be always in agreement with others. During their three years' work, which, in truth, had been laborious, not one of their decisions had been upset on appeal. How many judges could say the same! And as for head master-*jee*——? Would *Brine sahib*, if he could, remove those thirty stripes from the miscreant's back. "Ye have me there, *sahiban*," Tim O'Brien replied, with conviction, "I would not; an' that's God's truth."

So the old men sent in their resignations, not altogether regretfully. For one thing, the unanimity of their opinions had been disturbing; the old antagonism seemed more natural. And there the matter should have ended. Unfortunately for all, it did not. To be brief. Tim O'Brien was asked one day, as District Officer, to sign a warrant for the arrest of Sirdar Bikrama Singh and Khân Buktiyar Khân on a charge of assault and battery against the head master-*jee*, who turned out to be sib to half the local Bar.

There is no reason to go into the legal points of the incident, or to tell of the vain efforts of Tim O'Brien to save the whilom Bench from this last affront. An epidemic of cases against magistrates had set in, and late one evening the District Officer started to ride over and break the news of the coming arrest to the Hereditary Enemies.

Nagadrug stood on the nearest scarp of sand, so he went there first. He found the old Sirdar, looking rather frail, engaged as usual in glaring out over the arid fields to Shakingarh.

But this time all Tim O'Brien's tact did not avail for calm. Incredulous anger, half dazed indignation, took its place. It could not be true. What! was he, Rajput of Rajput, to be dragged to court at the bidding of a miserable hound whom he had whipped, and rightly whipped? Had not *Brine sahib* himself applauded the act? Had they not done right?—the plural pronoun came out naturally. Was not a false *guree* God's basest creature? Did not the law say so: "He who teaches false teaching, who kills his own soul and another, let him die." Why had they not given

the vile reptile an hundred stripes and so got rid of him altogether.

And now were they to have a degree (decree) against them? Shinjee! It should never be, never! never! They would not have it! The old tongue found no difficulty in thus claiming companionship in revolt, the old heart knew it was certain of sympathy in the ancient enmity.

Utterly sickened at a tragedy he could not prevent, the District Officer went, tactfully as ever, to Shakingarh; only to meet with even deeper indignation. Innocent though he knew himself to be, the Englishman positively writhed under the contemptuous unsparing scorn of the old Pathan. What! was the Sirkar not strong enough to protect itself? Then let it pack up its bundle and get out of Hindustan. Let it leave India and its problems to *his* people—those northern folk who had harried Bengal in the past, who, God willing, would harry it again. Had *Brine sahib* not heard the saying: "He who uses his public office to betray the State commits a crime against himself, his country, and his God." And had not the base hound betrayed the State? A thousand times, yes! It was a pity they had not flogged him to death.

The moon rose over the low sandhills before the District Officer, bruised and broken by the verdict of past India on the present, rode back to the sessions bungalow, where he meant to pass the night. For with the dawn he would go up with the police officer and so soften the arrest of the Hereditary Enemies so far as it could be softened.

They would be let out on bail, of course, and, at the worst, a fine more or less heavy would see them through. It was not so bad—not so very bad.

The District Officer tried to comfort himself with such reflections; in his heart he knew they were futile; that nothing would soften the degradation to those two old warriors.

Nothing! unless it was the calm moonlight that lay over the arid valley and turned the round old fortresses to dim mysterious palaces of light.

Perhaps the peace of it sank into the wearied hot old eyes that looked out from the ancestral roofs with a new

feeling of comradeship, each for each, dulling the hereditary hatred, yet bringing with it old memories, old tales of past enmity.

"Bring me my uniform, women!" said Bikrama Singh, suddenly. Half a dozen weeping daughters and daughters-in-law and an old wife too blind to see did as they were bid, and in a short time the old man stood arrayed as for a bridal, his sword buckled tight to his bowed back. "And the shield, women—the shield of my fathers that hangs in the entry. I shall need it, too!"

Over in Shakingarh, Buktiyar Khân, impelled likewise by those memories of the past, that hatred of the present, had donned his uniform likewise; and so the moonlight shone on cold steel and damascened gold as, silently obeying some inward community of thought, the two old men started silently alone, leaving all behind them, to seek for Peace in their own way.

Steadily over the arid fields, nearer and nearer to each other. The fields had been cut and carried; the harvest was over; it was nigh time to plough again for a fresh crop——

Of what?

"The Peace of the Unknown be upon you, oh, mine enemy," said Bikrama Singh, when at long last they stood face to face in the open.

"And the Peace of the Most Mighty be on you, my foe," answered Buktiyar Khân.

So for a moment there was silence. Then the Rajput spoke, his old voice full of fire, full of vibration.

"In the old days to which we belong, oh, Mahomedan! did brave men wait for Fate?"

"They did not wait, oh, Hindu," came the answer. "When brave men found sickness or dishonour before them: when there was no longer hope of victory: when that which lay ahead was hateful, and they left sons to carry on the race, did not the ancestors of my race claim of their enemies the glorious gift of battle?"

"They did so claim it, oh, Bikrama Singh! Dost claim it now?"

The reply, quick, vibrant, rang through the moonlight; a veritable challenge.

"Yea, Pathan—robber! thief! I claim it now! *Jug-dân*, Jug-dân—the Gift of Battle to the Death."

"Take it, pig of an idolator! Jug-dân, Jug-dân—the Gift of Battle!"

The still, hot air became full of faint chinkings, as buckles were settled straight, scabbards thrown aside. Then there was an instance silence as the two old warriors faced each other.

"Art ready . . . friend?" The question came softly.

"Yea! I am ready . . . friend!" The reply was almost a caress.

So, with a quick clash of sword on sword, youth and health and strength came back to the Hereditary Enemies.

* * * * *

It matters little if the combat ended in quarter of an hour, half an hour, or an hour; whether Bikrama Singh or Buktiyar Khân got in the first blow. The moon shone peacefully on the Gift of Battle. She still hung a white shield on the grey skies of dawn when Tim O'Brien and the police officer, coming to do their disagreeable duty, found the two old men lying stone dead within swords' thrust of each other on the stubble.

"They are really an incomprehensible lot," said the police officer, almost mournfully; "why the deuce should the two poor old buffers come out and kill each other, as presumably they have——"

Tim O'Brien smiled a grim smile. "You haven't heard, I suppose—why should ye—of what they call the Gift of Battle? Well! I have. It's an ould Rajput custom by which a man who feared he'd die in his bed or be put to it any way by any other stupid inept limitations, could claim a decent death from his nearest foe."

"Well! they've done it. That's all, and small blame to them."

"By God who made me, it's a protest with a vengeance. But the worst of it is, the Government won't see it and I can't explain it. Cipher telegrams won't run to it So . . . peace be with you, friends!"

THE VALUE OF A VOTE

A SKETCH FROM LIFE

He was an old man; a very old man. A Syyed—that is, a Mahomedan who claims direct descent from the prophet—by trade a Yunani hakeem, or physician according to the Grecian system, introduced to India, doubtless, by Alexander the Great. He had a little sort of shop, close to the principal gate of the city, where he was in touch with all those who, with its ship the camel, went out, or came back from the desert beyond, and with all strangers and sojourners in the land. So all day and every day you might see wearied travellers resting on the hard wooden platform set in a dark archway, of which his shop consisted, drinking out of green glass tumblers some restorative sherbet of things hot or things cold, things dry or things wet, while he showed dimly in the background, a visionary outline of long grey beard and high white turban. In this way he heard a good deal of what was going on both inside and outside the city, and as he was of the old school of the absolutely loyal outspoken Mahomedan, who, while he holds our rule to be inferior to that of his own faith, emphatically believes it to be superior to all others, I used often to pause in riding into or out of the city for a chat with the old man; seldom without benefit to myself. One morning—I remember it so well!—the *gram* fields outside the city were literally drenched with dew, making the fine tufts look like diamond plumes, amongst which the wealth of tiny purple blue pea blossom showed like a sowing of sapphires—I found him sitting with a troubled look on his high, wrinkled forehead, peering through his horn spectacles at a blue printed paper.

A patient was snoring contentedly on the boards, with, tucked into the hollow of his neck, a hard roly-poly bolster which made me ache to look at. Nothing brings home to one the impossibility of any Western judging what is, or

is not pleasant or convenient to an Eastern more than the ordinary rolling pin, two feet by six inches, stuffed hard with cotton wool, which the latter habitually uses as a pillow. The sight of it makes a Western neck feel stiff.

I recognised the paper at once. We were then in the throes of "Local Self Government," and a violent effort was being made to induce this little far-away town, inhabited for the most part by Pathans (exiled these centuries back from northern wilds to the Indian plain) to elect a Municipal Committee.

I had spent the better part of the day before in explaining to various Rais'es or honourable gentlemen of the city, that no insult was intended by asking them to put themselves up to auction as it were by the votes of their fellow citizens, instead of being discreetly and as ever nominated to the office of Councillor by the "hated alien." A few had gravely and dutifully given in to this new and quite incomprehensible fad of the constituted authorities, others had hesitated, but one, a fiery old Khan Bahadur, who was a retired risseldar from one of our crack native cavalry regiments, had sworn with many oaths that never would he take office from, amongst others, the perjured vote of Gunpat-Lal, pleader, who belonged to his ward, and whose evil, eloquent tongue had deliberately diddled him out of ancestral rights in a poppy field in the Huzoor's own court. No! He had served the Sirkar with distinction, he had, with his own hands, nearly killed an agitator he had found in the lines; nay, more! he had absolutely sent his daughter to school to please the *sahib logue*; but *this* was too much. It had been all I could do to prevent the hot-tempered old soldier from giving up the sword of honour with which he had been presented on retirement, as a signal of final rupture with the Government.

So, as I say, I recognised the blue paper at once as one of many voting papers which had been sent out for marking and return; for in these out of the way places in those days, the secret ballot-box was not the best blessing of the world, as it is now. And my old friend the hakeem was, I knew, on the Aga Khan's ward.

"What have you got to do with it?" I echoed, in reply to an anxious question. "Why, put a mark against the Aga Khan's name and give it back whence it came."

He salaamed profoundly. "Huzoor! that was the settled determination of this slave, thus combining new duties with old—which is the philosophy of faithful life; but, being called in last night to an indigestion in his house, which I combatted with burnt almonds, he told me that if I so much as went near his honourable name with my stylus, I should cease to be physician-in-ordinary to his household. And, father and son, we have been physicians to the Aga Khan ever since our fathers followed his fathers from Ghazni in that capacity with the Great Mahomed—on whom be peace."

"Then mark one of the other names—which you choose, and send it in," I replied, taking no notice of the scandalous attempt at coercion on the old Aga Khan's part.

A still more profound salaam was the answer. "That also would have occurred to me," came the suave old voice, "but that the Aga Khan said, with oaths, that if I so much as made a chance blot on this cursed paper against any of the names thereon, I should be cast for life from his honourable company."

I felt quite nettled. Her Majesty's lieges must not be intimidated in this fashion. "Well! you must think of the person whom you consider most fitted to fulfil all the many duties which will devolve on him, and put down *his* name," I said, for in these days when we really wished to get at the wishes of the people, we were not so strict about nominations and proposings and secondings as we are now, "and I will speak again to the Khan Bahadur and see if I cannot induce him to stand." (I meant to do so by threats of exposure for using force to Her Majesty's lieges!)

As I rode off, my horse picking its way through the piles of melons, the bags of corn, the jars of milk, the nets of pottery and all the *olla podrida* of trivial daily merchandise which finds pause for a few minutes about an active gate at dawn time, the patient sat up straight from his backboard and yawned, then asked for another

violet drink. But the hakeem was absorbed in the problem of voting.

I happened that day to have business in the city in the evening also, but I entered by another gate, so that the sun was nigh setting when, on my homeward way, I saw my old friend the Yunani hakeem sitting with his pile of little medicine bottles and tiny earthenware goglets of pills and ointments beside him.

He was pounding away at something in a minute jade mortar and looked no longer disturbed, but weary utterly.

"Have you settled that knotty point, hakeem sahib?" I asked.

He gave a sigh of relief, but pounded away faster than ever. "I give God thanks I have been led into the way of wisdom," he replied, "else would I be harried, indeed! Never, within the memory of man, have so many gentlemen of rank been sick as during this day. I am but now compounding the 'Thirty-six-ingredient-drug' for one honourable house, and have but just finished the 'Four-great-things' for another. 'Tis anxiety about the elections, methinks, for they talk of nothing else. Hardly had your Honour left this morning, than Gunpat-Lal sent to say he had a belly-ache which his idolatrous miracle-monger could not touch. I had it away in half an hour with cucumber and lemon juice. Cold things to cold. And Lala-ji full of compliments and regrets that the Aga Sahib would not be elected." A faintly worried air crept over the high old face.

"Did he ask you to give him your vote?" I enquired, with a sinking at my heart.

"Yea!" replied the Yunani hakeem cheerfully, "and offered me five rupees for it."

Ye Gods above! How soon political corruption seizes on the innocent, I thought.

"But others have offered more," continued the old man, with a certain self-satisfaction. Then his face clouded. "Yonder pasty-faced knock-kneed student, who calls himself 'Hedditerlile-jackdaw'" (Editor Loyal Objector) "told me it was his by right, since he and his like were Hindustan. But I told the lad God had ordained other-

wise—for look you, Huzoor, we Mussalmans came from the north many long years before the *sahib-logue* came from the west. So I let him talk, having, by God's mercy, come to a decision."

"What is that, hakeem-ji?" I asked, curious to know what had influenced the old man.

He salaamed quite simply. "The Huzoor bade me think who could best do the work, so I decided to vote for him. He is noble, and he knows what has to be done. He knows *santation* and *inspekshon-conservance.* Also *new-sense,* and *karl-ra-pre-kar-sons,* and"—he added, with the most beautiful supplementary salaam of pure flattery—"all other noble arts and philosophies." It quite gave me a pang to tell him that this scheme of his would not work. That I was *ex officio* president of the Municipal Committee, and thus beyond the reach of voters.

His face was illumined by a vast relief even amidst his perplexities.

"That is as it should be," he said simply. "The Sirkar then, has not, as they say, quite lost its head; the Huzoor retains it still. But what am I to do?"

I left him looking the picture of woe, absolutely unheeding of two patient travellers who had been awaiting my departure with that calm stolid disregard of the passing hour which brings with it to the Western such a sense of personal grievance; whereas to the Eastern it only emphasises his trust in Providence by proving the omnipotence of Fate.

Next morning, however, the whole aspect of affairs had been changed. Hakeem-ji was alert, spry, surrounded by quite a congregation of would-be patients, to whom he was giving out his *dicta* with quite a lordly air.

There was no need to ask him if he had settled his vexed question. That was apparent. I simply asked him what he had done about the paper.

"Huzoor," he said again, with that lucid candour which was so marked a feature of the man himself, "the Lord mercifully directed me. Therefore I ate it, and it hath done me much good."

"Ate it?" I echoed. "You don't mean to say——"

"Huzoor!" he interrupted cheerfully, "this is how it was. After your Honour left, it was the time of evening prayer. So I went, after my usual custom, to the House of God, to await the cry of the Muazzim and prepare myself for the presence of the Most High by the necessary ablutions. And as I sat squatted on the edge of the Pool of Purification, my hands in the cool water, I felt as if naught could cleanse me from that accursed paper that lay folded in my breast. So I cried in my heart to the prophet that he should show me a way, and then in one moment I saw where the error lay. I was arrogating to myself decisions that should be left to the Almighty. So I did what I do ever when life and death are at issue; when even the mighty skill of medicine has to stand on one side and do nothing.

"I took my stylus, and I wrote all over that paper the attributes of the Most High—His mercy, His truth, His wisdom, His great loving-kindness. And then, Huzoor, I crushed it into the form of a bolus, covered it with silver foil, and swallowed it as a pill.

"It hath done me much good. I am now free from anxiety. The decision of all things rests with the Most Mighty."

THE SALT OF THE EARTH

"The Huzoor is the salt of the earth," said Hoshyari Mull, submissively. He had been educated, he asserted, at a mission school: thus the words of Scripture came handy to him. So also did a variety of other things.

"And you are the biggest scoundrel unhung. I know that, though I can't find you out—yet," retorted the Boy, almost savagely. He was really a Boy, a round-faced, fresh-coloured English Boy, though his years numbered twenty-four, and he was a full-blown Salt Patrol on the Great Customs Hedge, which, in the 'fifties and 'sixties, still stretched between the river Indus, as it flows to the Arabian Sea, and the Mahanuddi river that finds its way to the Bay of Bengal; in other words, stretched for fifteen hundred miles across the vast continent of India. It was a strange, weird barrier, this vast hedge of cactus and thorny acacia, of prickly palms, and still more prickly agaves, that thrust out their spiked swords boldly from a buckler of spine-set thicket. It was fully fourteen feet high, and of its width one could only guess, in passing through the break, every ten miles or so, where some first-class road claimed a long passage-way through it. Here it was that the Patrols had their bungalows, and it was at one of these that the Boy lived. It was a very important post, because it was, so to speak, the gateway between the South-West and the North-East; that is to say, between Bombay and the Central Provinces, and Delhi, Oude, Bengal. Then, lying as it did, right in the Rajputana Desert, with no other roadway within twenty miles of it on either side, it needed a sharp look out all along the line to prevent isolated attempts at smuggling. But the Boy was quick at his work, and spent all his youthful energy in preserving the intactness of his Customs Hedge. The life, however, was as strange and weird as was the barrier. Absolute loneliness, absolute isolation. For long months together not

one word of your mother-tongue. With luck, a weekly post. No books, no newspapers, no civilisation of any kind. On the other hand there was endless sport, unfailing interest for those who loved wild things. And the Boy had never been one for books. Harrow had left him, one may say, uncontaminated by them; examinations had passed him by; so, though both his grandfathers had been high Indian officials, he had drifted naturally into the Salt Department; the last refuge, not of the incompetent, but the unlearned. There, to be a man was all that was asked of you. Without manhood the salt had lost its savour; there was no possibility of salting it with all the 'ologies in existence.

Hoshyari Mull paused in his deft winding-on of the Huzoor's putties, to say submissively, "The Salt of the Earth speaks truth." Whereat the Boy laughed.

He and Hoshyari were at once friends and enemies. The latter was chief native supervisor, a man of about forty, above middle height, smooth faced and lissome. There was nothing, the Boy soon found out, which he could not do; which, in fact, he did not do. An excellent accountant, he was also an excellent shot. If he knew, or said he knew, every smuggler of salt between Attock and Cuttack, he also knew every bird and beast and butterfly by name, and could tell you the habits of all and sundry. He knew the history of Ancient India by heart, and could pour forth legend and tale by the yard. He was a magnificent swordsman, and could teach the Boy, who had learnt singlestick, many cuts and thrusts.

In short, he was all things to the Boy; without him, life in the Patrol bungalow would, indeed, have lost its savour. And yet the Boy mistrusted him, for no reason, except vaguely that he was too clever by half. Hoshyari, for his part, regarded the Boy as he had regarded no other master. He had been, as it were, *impresario* of amusement to several Huzoors of the ordinary type. This one was different. This one was as the Angels of God. That is how Hoshyari put it to himself, and, on the whole, it was a sufficiently comprehensive description, and led to thoroughly wholesome treatment. Here was no necessity

for *itr* of rose, no distilled waters of any description, save the dew of heaven, as it gathered on the gram fields where the black buck lay, or hung like a diamond on a cactus flower over which some rare butterfly hovered.

But there was no dew this hot May dawn, when Hoshyari Mull, with the deftness of an expert, was putting the woollen bandages on the Huzoor's long legs. It was not his work; but then half the things he did were not that. "I thought you were a Brahman; but I don't believe you are even a Hindu," the Boy had said scornfully to him one day, when, foraging for breakfast in a village, Hoshyari had come back, triumphantly, with half a dozen eggs in his high caste hand. Hoshyari had smiled. "I am a Srimali Brahman, Huzoor," he had replied tolerantly. "The Maharajah of Jaipur salaams to me. There are none here in the wilderness able to say Hoshyari hath defiled himself."

So he made no ado about this putting on of putties. They were, as he had proved to the Boy, the best of all protection against snake bite. With them on you might almost venture on trying to find a gap in the Great Salt Hedge; without them it was madness; for is not the prickly pear called in the vernaculars, *naga-pan*, or serpent shelter? And on these hot May mornings, as well as at noontide, were there not along the Customs line many pairs of watching, unwinking eyes lying in wait for the unwary, beside those of the fourteen thousand humans who patrolled its long length day and night?

Truly there were. As they cantered along it, after passing through the gateway, many a faint rustle among the colocynth apples at its base told of death among the flowers. For the Hedge was at its blossom time. Thorny salmon-coloured capers began it, with here and there a yellow cactus bloom, or, perhaps, a rare red one, on whose stems the wild cochineal insect lay like tiny spots of blood. Above it, a wilderness of these same cactus flowers, big as a tea cup, primrose within, the white stamens ranged sedately round the whiter star-pistil; then yellow without, shading to purple. Above them the violet-scented puff-balls of the thorny mimosa, with every now

and again a great lance of aloe blossom, brown and white, all set with flower bells.

And above all, butterflies, dragon flies, moths, flitting in myriads. "That is the gap, Huzoor, where the ill-begotten hound of a Poorbeah managed to smuggle in a back-load of salt last week. He was going to carry it all the way to Kashi (Benares) he said. As the Salt of the Earth will see, it is now thoroughly mended," remarked Hoshyari, with a debonair smile of superiority.

The Boy frowned. There was too much, to his liking, of these petty discoveries. That long line of Hedge had not been planted, was not kept up, to prevent the smuggling of a poor back-load of salt. He looked at Hoshyari with dissatisfaction in his face.

"When are we going to find something worth finding out?" he asked cavalierly.

"If it is God's will, before long, Huzoor," was the reply, and there was a curious undertone of certainty about it. "Look, my lord! yonder are the buck. They are on the move already; we must hasten."

They were off at a gallop, rifles crossed on the saddle bow, over the hard white *putt* ground that was interspersed by ribbed drifts of fine white sand. Hoshyari sate his horse like an Englishman. Indeed, the Boy, looking at him, used often to think that, barring his colour, he seemed of kindred race; as, in truth, he was, since the Srimali Brahman is Aryan of the Aryans. There was, in fact, only that vague distrust to keep them apart; and that always vanished before sport.

It was a hot day, they followed the buck far, then, the Boy having a sudden headache from the sun, paused by Hoshyari's advice at some wandering goatherd's thatch for a hearth-baked cake, a drink of milk, and a rest till noon should have passed.

A very hot day; and the Boy rested in the shade of *jund* tree on a string bed, and slept profoundly.

When he woke, the shadows were lengthening, and Hoshyari, squatted on the ground beside him, had a new look on his face; a look of anxiety mingled with satisfaction.

"Huzoor!" he said, "I have news for you! What I

have always prophesied, what I have always told you would happen if the Sirkar were not more careful, has come to pass. The native troops in Meerut have mutinied; they have gone to Delhi and murdered the *Sahib-logue*. I rode back to the depôt while the Salt of the Earth slept, to see all was right, and—and I heard it at the gate."

"At the gate," echoed the Boy, still stupid with sleep. "Who brought the news—has the post come in?"

Hoshyari's face was a study. He must break this thing gently to the Boy, who was a full-blown Salt Patrol, or he would see red, try to kill and be killed. And that must not be; quite a pang at the very thought shot through heart and brain, making him realise that this Boy of an alien race had grown dear to him.

"The post had not come in, Salt of the Earth," he said evasively. "Men brought it from the South."

"The South," echoed the Boy again, with a relieved yawn; "then it's a lie. How could they know, if we didn't?"

How? Hoshyari could have answered that question easily; he knew the strange wordless rapidity with which news travels in India; in Delhi to-day, in Peshawur to-morrow. A mystery that has passed undiscovered with the coming of telegraphs and telephones that do it for pennies and twopences.

Yes! he knew, but his task was to prevent this Angel of God from putting his life into the hands of men who, at best, were devils; as he was, himself, at bottom. He knew that also. Most men with brains did.

"It is not a lie, Huzoor," he said, simply. "These men are mutineers themselves. They are going to join those at Delhi, murdering all the Sahibs they can on the way."

He had laid his plan while the Salt of the Earth slept, and watched the effect of his words upon the Boy narrowly; hoping that even the defence of a post might take second place before the duty of giving a warning—and that would mean being out of danger—for the time.

The Boy's face blanched. He had been away to the nearest station, fifty miles off, for a three days' holiday at Christmas, and the remembrance of a laughing girl with

blue eyes came back to him now with a rush. Hoshyari saw his chance, and went on——

"The plans were laid for later on, Huzoor, so they are taken by surprise themselves; yet it gives them advantage also, since everywhere the Sahibs are taken by surprise also; if only they had been prepared it might be different."

The cunning told; the Boy's face hardened into thought. Fifty miles on, along the road. He might do it.

"When did they come in? I suppose they forced the guard," he added, his voice almost breaking in its resentment.

"About noon, Huzoor," came the wily tones. "They were wearied out."

So much the better; they would not start, likely, till just before dawn next day. If he could give warning. He rose and looked round for his horse.

Hoshyari rose also. "The Salt of the Earth cannot ride through the gate," he said—the time for dissuasion had come now. "He will only be killed in the attempt."

The Boy rounded on him instantly. "Didn't I always tell you you were the greatest scoundrel unhung? Now I've found you out, you skunk!"

"Has this slave not always said the Huzoor was as the Salt of the Earth," came the instant rapid reply. "My lord, listen! This is the Hand of Fate. Wise men bow to it. You are here, safe, alone, none know of you. Come with this slave and he will save you . . ."

"D—n you, you scoundrel," shouted the Boy blindly, and fumbled for the stirrups.

"Huzoor! that is useless!" came Hoshyari's voice, quiet now; all entreaty gone. In its place almost command. "You cannot force the barrier. Where we had one man, they have ten."

"I will try," muttered the Boy, doggedly. "I can but try."

"The Huzoor can do better," said Hoshyari. "He can come with me. I know a way."

Even in his excitement the full meaning of this came home to the Boy.

"You know?" he echoed under his breath, "didn't I always say you were the greatest scoundrel unhung?"

"And the Huzoor is the Salt of the Earth," came the unfailing reply.

The rapid Indian dusk was falling as they made their way on foot to a village which, though almost exactly opposite the barrier, still lay the orthodox half mile from the Hedge, within which, by rule of the Salt Department, no building might be erected. The Boy was now in native dress, for Hoshyari had utilised the interval of time in arranging for the former's midnight ride of warning.

In reporting on these arrangements, he had given scope to his imagination as to their difficulty. In reality, he had only had to ride up to the barrier, give the password, and enter, to be welcomed as one of the party within. Whether he was at heart one of them, or whether, all things considered, his cleverness had come to the conclusion that it was best for his purpose to fall in with their mood for the time being, is uncertain; but that purpose was clear, namely, to get the Boy out of the danger zone if he could. So he raised no objection to the looting of the Salt Patrol's bungalow—the little Salt Patrol who, doubtless, had run away into the jungle in the hope of escape, being but a mere boy—but the office must be let alone. There must be no tampering with books and registers, since he, Hoshyari Mull, Srimali Brahman, whose father—God rest him—had been Prime Minister to a Prince, was accountable for them to the powers that be—be they John Company or the Badshah. Therefore the doors must be locked and the keys given to him. And that Kathyawar mare in the stable was his; so that was an end of it. Whoever laid hands on the beast would rue the deed. But all this was past: now he had to get the Boy through the Hedge, incredible though it seemed. "The furthermost house in the village is mine, Huzoor," said Hoshyari, gravely. "It is thence that, in disguise, I penetrate the evil designs of the smugglers."

The Boy ground his teeth, and was silent. He knew what he would say; but this was not the time to say it; this was the time to warn his countrymen.

They found the tiny hamlet deserted; as all knew, half India fled before the mutineers.

"It is as well," remarked Hoshyari, hardily, "since they might talk, though none know of the secret save this slave and Suchet Singh, the waiting-house keeper."

But as they came upon what was called the waiting-house, since here salt that arrived without proper papers, or that failed to pay the toll, was held up, they found Suchet Singh the Sikh lying dead at his post. The Boy ground his teeth again. So would he be lying but for his desire not only to die, but to do.

"Look sharp, will you," he said, roughly, to his companion, "we lose time. The moon will be up ere long."

Hoshyari led the way across a yard; an ordinary village house yard with a row of three or four native corn granaries standing against one wall. These are huge basketwork erections, each taller than a man, in shape not unlike a big pickle bottle, fixed to the ground and carefully plastered over with mud and cow dung.

"They are all full," said Hoshyari, with a curious smile, as he passed one; and, sure enough, as he lifted the little sliding door at the bottom, a tiny moraine of wheat fell forward in the half light. But the next instant, with a dexterous twist of his hand, the whole *kothe* slid round as on a pivot, disclosing a round well-like hole.

"We shall need a light," said Hoshyari in a matter-of-fact tone, and produced a tinder box and a candle from a niche at his feet.

Once again the Boy ground his teeth. So this was the way, was it? and all the time this biggest scoundrel that ever went unhung was discovering miserable back-loads of smuggling! Words had failed him long since; now thought failed him also; he plodded on, his head bent, down the narrow subterranean passage that scarcely showed in the flickering candle light.

But here, surely, there was less gloom and more room. He stood upright and glanced above him. A star showed through a tangle of branches.

"We are under the Great Hedge, Huzoor," said Hoshyari, deferentially, in answer to his look. "The

passage needed air, and we also required to have a store closer at hand." He held up the light, and it fell faintly on rows on rows of sacks of salt ranged round a central space. "It is quite light here in the daytime, Huzoor," he went on cheerfully. "Sometimes the sun actually shines in; and the snakes do not fall down now that we have put a net across the opening."

So this was one of the things concealed in the great width of the Hedge. Who would have dreamt of it? Who *could* have dreamt it? Something of the comicality of the whole affair was beginning to filter into the Boy's brain; he caught himself wondering where the passage ended—under his bed, maybe!

It was almost as bad. "We are there, Huzoor," said Hoshyari, mounting some steep steps, and then swung a panel blocking the passage backwards. It had shelves on it, and books. He heard the turning of a key, he followed his leader, and the next minute stood in the growing light which presages a rising moon, inside the office room, looking stupidly at what lay behind him; only a cupboard in the mud wall where the ledgers were kept.

Dazed as he was, he yet realised partly how it was done. The wall must be thicker than it seemed—twice, three times, perhaps four times as thick—but who would have dreamed! And for the rest? He looked at Hoshyari defiantly—the latter answered in words.

"It was quite easy, Huzoor," he replied, lightly. "We could always replace salt that was taken from the Government storehouse next door with salt from our storehouse yonder. And that paid nothing."

The Boy gave a little gasp. But there was no time for that sort of thing now. The Kathyawar mare was waiting, the moon would be up in ten minutes or so, and he must be beyond sight of the chattering devils he could hear outside before them; but perhaps—yes! perhaps he might be able to come back—to come back and give these fellows their deserts.

"I'll pay you out yet—you're the greatest scoundrel unhung," he said, thickly, as Hoshyari held the stirrup for him.

"And the Huzoor is the Salt of the Earth," came the urbane reply.

After that there was silence on the far side of the office for five minutes—for ten minutes. Then, faint and far, only to be heard of an anxious listener, came the sound of a horse's hoofs as it was let into its stride.

The Huzoor had got through the picket, and if he only remembered instructions, might be considered safe for those fifty miles across country. Hoshyari drew a breath of relief, shut the door, and lay down placidly to sleep, feeling he had done his best. It is true he had sent the Angel of God on a wild goose chase; for, briefly, the mutineers had gone on straight that morning, only leaving a strong guard at the gate to keep it until the second body of rebels should come in next day.

So by this time, doubtless, the fate of Englishmen—aye, and every Englishwoman, too, on the route to Delhi must have been settled. But the ride would keep the Salt of the Earth out of danger, since it prevented him from doing rash things; which otherwise he was sure to have done; for what was the use of losing one's life in fighting two to a hundred; still less if it were only one. And these things were on the knees of the Gods. No! there was no use, especially when the store ammunition was in the hands of the enemy and you had expended your pouch full on black buck. The Huzoor was best away. With luck he would only find the cold ashes of outbreak. The hurricane of revolt would have spent itself, for, after all, it was only the soldiers who would mutiny. The rabble in the towns might follow suit; but there was safety yet in the country.

So he fell asleep.

When he woke it was broad daylight. Daylight? Why, it must be nigh on noon. He stepped to the door and looked through the panes. Aye! the sentry in the verandah was eating his bread. And the other detachment had come in. The courtyard was crowded with men. So much the better, for they would only rest during the heat of the day, and go on at sundown. Thus there would be peace before the Salt of the Earth could possibly return—if he did return; but once away from his post he would, most likely, and wisely, make for security to the north.

Meanwhile, it was time for him to think of himself.

There was gold in the safe yonder, and it would be folly to leave it to new masters who had no more right to it than he. He went over to it, set the iron door open and began to gather together what he found.

The room was very still, but on the one side came the clamour of the newly-arrived rebels. He gave one last glance at them through the closed door, then slipped into the verandah on the other side. Then he paused before a dusty swaying figure that, throwing up its arms as it saw him, came at him like a wild beast. It was a time for calm —with those men in the courtyard, a time of calm for both!

He stood back a step and said, quietly, "So you have returned—Salt of the Earth."

The Boy seemed for an instant dazed, then a loud, reckless laugh rang out, "Come back! Yes! I've come back to kill you, you d—d scoundrel. I've come back as I said I'd come."

"I saved the Huzoor's life," interrupted Hoshyari, quietly, "and I'll save it again, if he will not speak so loud; the sentry will hear, and then——"

"Let him hear—I'll have time to kill you first," went on the Boy, blindly; for all that he lowered his voice; the instinct of belief in Hoshyari's wisdom was strong.

"The Huzoor would not have time," whispered the latter, blandly. "I am no fool at wrestling, as he knows; and he knows also that I tried to save him."

There was a sudden unexpected appeal in the tone which surprised even the man himself. He could have cried over this Angel of God who refused to be saved.

The Boy looked at him with dry hot eyes; there were no tears there—he had seen too many horrors for that. And he had ridden all night, all day, till the Kathyawar mare had dropped with him; then he had stumbled on as best he might, intent on revenge. And now the sight of Hoshyari was as the sight of a friend's face: it brought back the memory of so many jolly times they had had together. And what he said was true: the man had tried to save him.

He had to bolster up his anger. "It—it's the other thing you've got to answer for, you—you thief."

Hoshyari's eyes gleamed. "Don't call me that again, Huzoor. I am no thief. I was only—cleverer than other folk."

"I'll call you it ten times over if I choose. Thief! mean, miserable, petty thief."

There was something more savage in the whispered quarrel than if the two had been shouting at each other, and Hoshyari's gasp of rage fell on absolute silence, as, breathing hard, they looked at each other.

Then the Boy passed his hand wearily over his forehead. "No!" he said. "I can't—you're right—I can't kill you like a dog—we must fight it out—there are foils or swords somewhere—foils with the buttons off—where are they?"

His dependence on the elder man showed in his helplessness; he asked as a child might have asked.

There was almost a sob in his throat, but the voice which answered was firm.

"They are on the wall, Huzoor; but we cannot fight here; the sentry would hear, and——"

"D—n the sentry," said the Boy again, helplessly. "What can we do?"

Hoshyari thought for a moment. "There is light enough in the storehouse under the Great Hedge——" he began.

The Boy leapt up, fire in his eyes. "By God in heaven, it shall be there—and, mind you, it's to the death, you cursed smuggler."

"To the death, Salt of the Earth." A minute later the false back to the record cupboard swung to its lock with a click, and the office was empty.

* * * * *

The cactus flowers bloomed and faded; the violet-scented mimosa puff-balls fell in gold showers on the green lobes, the aloe bells withered in silence, the waiting, watching eyes waited and watched in vain. If the snakes, as they slid over the netting-covered round hole in the thickness of the great Salt Hedge, had looked down into the widening sunlit circle below them, what would they have seen?

Who knows, since Suchet Singh the Sikh lay dead at his post.

AN APPRECIATED RUPEE

She was a poor Mahomedan widow, and lived in an unconceivable sort of burrow under the tall winding stair of a big tenement house, which in its turn was hidden away in a long, winding, sunless alley. The stair centred round a sort of shaft, barred at each storey by iron gratings, narrow enough to admit of refuse being thrown down—the shaft being, briefly, the rubbish shoot of the building, so that old Maimuna—who seldom left her seclusion till the evening—had, in passing to and fro, to step over quite a pile of radish parings, cauliflower stalks, fluff, rags—a whole day's sweepings and leavings of the folk higher up in the world than she.

And even when she reached the odd-shaped cell of a place, whose only furniture consisted of a rickety bed with string-halt in two of its emaciated legs, a low stool and a spinning wheel, she was not free from her neighbours' off-scourings; for down the wall beside the low latticed window, where, perforce, she had to set her spinning wheel, crept a slimy black streak of sewage from above, which smelt horribly, on its way to join the open drain in the middle of the alley. Yet here Maimuna Begam, Patha-ni from Kasur, had lived for fifteen years of childless widowhood; lived far away from her home and people, too poor to rejoin them, too ignorant to hold her own among strangers. For she had been that most intolerable of interlopers—the wife of a man's old age. Not a suitable wife bringing a dower into the family; but one who, as a widow, might—unless the other heirs took active measures to prevent it—claim her portion of one-sixth for life. A wife, too, without a pretence of any position save that of the strictest seclusion; a seclusion so untouched by modern latitude as to be in itself second-rate. Without good looks also, and married simply and solely because old Jehan Latif had fancied some quail curry which he had eaten

when business called him to Kasur, and, as the best way of securing repetition of the delicacy, had married the compounder and carried her back to Lucknow; where, to tell truth, he found more attractions in the cook than he had anticipated when he paid a good round sum for his middle-aged bride. For Maimuna was a good woman—kindly, gentle, pious—who had lived discreetly in her father's house, and helped to cook quail curry for that somewhat dissolute old swashbuckler ever since, as a girl of twelve, her husband had died before she had even seen him.

So, while she pounded the spices and boned the quails (since that was one of the refinements of the *bonne-bouche*) for old Jehan Latif, Maimuna used sometimes to think, with a kind of wondering regret, what life would have been like if the husband of her youth had not died of the measles; but, being conscientious, she never allowed the tears to drop into the quail curry!

It was no carelessness of hers, therefore, which led to fat Jehan Latif falling into a fit shortly after partaking of his favourite dish, which for ten years she had dutifully prepared for him. None-the-less, his heirs (who had had all these years in which to cook their accounts of the matter) treated her as if it were. There is no need to enter into details. Those who know India know how unscrupulous heirs can oppress a strange lone woman—ignorant, secluded; a woman whose position as wife has from the first been cavilled at, resented, impugned. It is sufficient to say that Maimuna, after a few feeble protests, found herself in the little cell under the stairs, earning a few farthings by her spinning wheel, and thankful that her great skill at it kept her from that last resort of deserted womanhood in India—the quern. Even so, it was hard at times to wait till there was sufficient thread in the percentage she got back for her spinning, to make it worth while for the merchant to buy it from her, or for her to break in, by a cash transaction, on the curious succession of cotton bought, and thread returned, without a coin changing hands. And this winter it was harder than ever, for the unusual cold made her fingers stiff, and sent shoots of rheumatism up her arm as

she sat spinning in the ray of light which came in with the smell.

It was very cold indeed that New Year's afternoon, and Maimuna felt more than usually down-hearted; for there had been a death upstairs, and she knew that the stamping and shufflings she could hear coming rhythmically downwards over her head were the feet of those carrying a corpse. Now, weary and worn as she was, Maimuna—between the fifties and sixties—did not yet feel inclined to fold her hands and give in. Even now it needed a very little thing to bring a smile to her face; and once, when a child had fallen downstairs, she had surprised the neighbours by her alert decision So that when she heard girls' shrill voices in half-giggling alarm through her door—which was ajar—she guessed at the cause, and called to the owners to come in until the stairs should be clear.

One (a slip of a thing ten years old) she knew as the daughter of a gold-thread worker higher up the stairs; the other (not more than five or six) was a stranger; a fat broad-faced morsel, with a stolid look, and something held very tight in one small chubby hand. She was dressed in the cleanest of new clothes, scanty of stuff, but gay, with a yard or two of tinsel on her scrap of a veil. Maimuna paused in the whirr and hum of her wheel to look at the children wistfully; her own childlessness had always seemed a crime to her.

"It is Fatma, the pen-maker's girl, *Mai*," said the gold-worker's daughter, patronisingly. "She is just back from the Missen School, where they have been having a big festival because it is the *sahib log's* big day."

"Tchuk," dissented the solemn-faced baby, clucking her tongue in emphatic denial. "It is not the Big Day. It is because *Malika* Victoria is—is——" The solemnity merged in confusion, finally into a sort of appealing defiance: "Is—is—*that*——"

She unclasped her fist, and held out a brand new shining silver two-anna bit. It was one of those struck when her Majesty the Queen assumed the Imperial title.

The gold-worker's daughter giggled. "She means Wictoria *Kaiser-i-hind*, you know. What the guns were

about this morning. They are to go off every year, they say. That will be fun!"

"But why?" asked Maimuna, puzzled. Her life for close on five-and-twenty years had been spent in the cooking of quail curry and spinning of cotton—the very Mutiny had passed by unknown to her. She had heard vaguely of the Queen, and knew that it was her head on the rupee which, despite the hard times, she always wore on a black silk skein round her neck, because she had worn it since her babyhood, when the parents of the boy who had died of the measles had sent it her; but what the Queen had to do with John Company Bahadar, or he to her, was a mystery.

"Why," giggled the elder girl, "because she is going to be the King, and turn all the men out. That is what father says. He says she is sure to favour the women, and I think that will be fun. But Fatma knows it all. Come! dear one! Sing Maimuna that song the *miss sahibs* made the schools sing to-day. Sing it soft, close, close up to her ear, so that no one may hear it—for they don't like her singing, you know, at home, *Mai*: it isn't respectable."

So, standing on tip-toe, steadying herself against Maimuna's arm by the hand which held the two-anna bit, Fatma began in a most unmelodious whisper to chant a Hindee version of "God Save our Gracious Queen." The words as well as the tune were a difficulty to the fat, solemn-faced child, but the old woman sat listening and looking at the two-anna bit with a new interest, a new wonder in her weary eyes.

"Bismillah!" she said, half way through, when the gold-worker's daughter, becoming impatient, declared the corpse must have passed, and dragged Fatma off incontinently. "And she is a woman—only a woman!"

The girls paused at the door; the elder to nod and giggle, the younger to stand sedate and solemn, wagging one small forefinger backwards and forwards in negation.

"Tchuk! you shouldn't say that, Mai! Little girls are made of sugar and spice. It is little boys that are made nasty—the *miss* says so."

"She should not say so," faltered Maimuna, aghast.

The very idea was preposterous, upsetting her whole cosmogony; but when they had closed the door, she sat idle, too astonished to work. Then, suddenly, she took off the black silk hank with its precious rupee, and looked at the woman's head at the back.

It was a young woman there; young and unveiled—strange, incomprehensible! But that other on the two-anna bit had been an old woman, more decently dressed, and with a crown on her head.

"Frustrate their knavish tricks."

Fatma's song returned to memory. So the Queen, too, had enemies; and yet she was Kaiser-i-hind, and, what is more, she made men like the gold-thread worker upstairs tremble!

"On thee our hopes we fix!"

* * * * *

Maimuna sat, and sat, and sat, looking at that rupee.

* * * * *

It was a day or two after this that an English official was sitting smoking in his verandah, when he became aware of a whispered colloquy behind him. It was someone, no doubt, trying, through the red-coated *chaprasi*, to gain an audience of him; and he was newly back from office, tired, impatient, perhaps, of the hopelessness of doing justice always. So he took no notice till something roused him to a swift turn, a swifter question. "What's that, *chaprasi*?" *That* was the unmistakable chink of fallen silver, the unmistakable whirr of a running rupee, the unmistakable buzzing ring of its settling to rest. And there, midway between a giving and a taking hand, lay the rupee itself—the Queen's head uppermost.

"*Hazoor*!" explained the *chaprasi*, glibly, "your slave was virtuously refusing; he was sending this ill-bred one away. Hat! *budhi!** Hat!"

But the sight of that head on the precious rupee, which, after many heartsearchings, poor Maimuna had determined

* Old woman.

to risk in this effort to gain justice from a *budhi* like herself, whose enemies also had knavish tricks, brought courage to the old heart, and the old woman stood her ground.

"*Gharibparwar*!" she said quietly, with her best salaam—and in the old Pathan house they had taught manners, if nothing else—"Little Fatma, the pen-maker's daughter, says that Wictoria Kaiser-i-hind is an old woman like me, and so I have fixed my hopes on her. There is my rupee. It is all I have, and I want my widow's portion."

* * * * *

And she got it. It happened years ago, but the story is worth telling to-day, when women can no longer sing "God Save the Queen."

THE LAKE OF HIGH HOPE

A man stood watching a primrose dawn. There was a cloud upon his face; none on the wide expanse of light-suffused sky beyond the dim distance of the world. At his feet lay, stretching far, irregularly, into the grey mistiness of morning, a great sheet of water. The dawn showed on it as in a mirror, save where tall sedges and reeds sent still-shining shadows over its level light. Unutterable peace lay upon all things. They seemed still asleep, though the new day had come, bringing with it good and evil, rest and strife.

And then, suddenly, there was a change. The man turned swiftly at a light footstep behind him, to see a woman, and in an instant passion leapt up, bringing with it joy and despair. For the woman was another man's wife.

But something in her face made him open his arms and take her close to his clasp. It seemed to him as if he had been waiting for this moment ever since he was born.

She was a little bit of a woman, frail and fair, who looked over-weighted by her dark riding habit, but both seemed lost in the man's hold, as vibrating with tense emotion, he stood silent, their mingled figures forming a swaying shadow against that further light.

"At last," he said, in tender exultation, "at long last!"

She threw back her head then, and looked him in the eyes, hope and fear, and joy and sorrow showing in her face.

"I couldn't stand it—at the last," she almost sobbed, "when it came to going away, and leaving you here—alone—with that awful risk—for no one can say what mayn't come—with cholera—— *He*"—her voice trembled over the small syllable—"started earlier—I am to meet him by-and-by—so I came round—just to see you—and now——" She buried her face again, and the sobs shook her gently. He tightened his hold.

"I'm glad!" he replied, in a hard voice. "It was bound

to come sooner or later—you couldn't go on for ever—an angel from heaven couldn't go on standing—it all. But now——" his voice changed—"now you and I——" he broke off and raised his head to listen.

It was a wild weird cry, that echoed and re-echoed over the wide stretches of water, that rose in one long continuous melodious wail from every reed bed, every thicket of sedge, every tuft of low lamarisk and bent-rush; for it was the dawn-cry of the myriad wild fowl which haunted this low-lying *jheel* of Northern India, and swift as thought, with a thunderous whirr of wide wings, the birds, teal and mallard and widgeon, white eye, pochard, and green shank, purple heron and white, rose in ones, in twos, in threes, in flocks, in companies, in serried battalions.

The primrose dawn was half effaced, the coming day was darkened by wheeling, veering, eddying flight, and the peace vanished in the strife of wings.

"By George! what a shot," cried the man excitedly, even passion forgotten as a trail of whistling teal swooped past, unconscious of them, to settle on the still water, then, recognising unlooked for humanity, veered at sharp angle to rise again into the troubled air.

But the woman clung closer. To her the interruption was terrible. The soaring birds brought home to her what she had done, and before that knowledge compelling emotion stopped abruptly.

"It is very foolish of me," she murmured brokenly, "and very wrong—though I don't know!—I don't know! It was your danger—and I was so tired—besides it—it need make no difference."

"No difference?" he echoed, in joyous, incredulous exultation. "Why, of course, it makes all the difference in the world, little woman! You and I can never go back again, *now*! We can never pretend again that we don't care! No! when this cholera camp is over, and I have time, we must think over what is to be done—but it's final. Yes! it's final, my darling, my darling!"

His kisses rained on her face, his heart encompassed her. So they stood for a while, oblivious of the wheeling, veering,

eddying wings above them, oblivious of all things save that they were lovers, and that they knew it.

Then she left him. "He" would be wondering why she was so late; but Suleimau, the Arab pony, would soon carry her over the sandy plain.

The man remained watching the slight figure on the bounding grey till it was lost in the "azure silk of morning." Then he returned slowly to the *jheel* again, lost in thought. There was a good deal whereof to think, for she was a mother; by ill luck the mother of girls. Why had she worn those tiny presentments of their sweet baby faces in the double heart brooch which fastened her folded tie? She had not thought, of course; but it had somehow come between him and his kisses after he had noticed it.

Well! it was unfortunate; but that sort of thing had to be faced, and he *would* face it after he had seen his cholera camp through; for he was a doctor, and the thought of what might lie before him was with him as a background to all others. He had chosen a good place for the camp, yonder among the low sandhills, which were the highest point in all the desert plain, and, if that did not kill the germ, they could move on.

Meanwhile—— He drew a long breath and looked out over the water. The primrose dawn had passed to amber, the amber was beginning to flame, the whirring wings had carried the birds to distant feeding grounds, only a flock of egrets remained fishing solemnly in a distant shallow.

"The Huzoor is looking for God's birds," said a courteous voice beside him. "They have gone, likely, to the Lake of High Hope, for it nears the time of transit to a Higher Land."

The speaker was an old man seated so close to the water that his feet and legs were hidden by it. He had a simple, pleasant face, which over-thinness had refined almost to austerity.

The doctor took stock of him quietly. His speech proclaimed him a down country man, his lack of any garment save a strip of saffron cloth around his loins suggested asceticism, but his smile was at once familiar and kindly.

"Mānasa Sarovara?" replied the Englishman, carelessly, "is that what you mean? I am told the birds really do go there during the hot weather. I wonder if it is true. I should like to see it." He spoke half to himself, for he was somewhat of an ornothologist and the tale of the great West Tibetan Lake of Refuge for God's dear birds—that lake far from the haunts of men amid the eternal snow and ice, into which so many streams flow, out of which come none—had caught his fancy.

"The Huzoor can go when he chooses," remarked the old man placidly; "but he must leave many things behind him first; the *mem sahiba*, for instance."

The doctor felt himself flush up to the very roots of his hair, and his first instinct was to fall upon the evident eavesdropper. Consideration natheless condemning this course, he tried cool indifference.

"You have been here some time, I perceive," he said calmly.

"I have been all the time behind the *shivala*," acquiesced the other, with beautiful frankness, as he pointed to a large black upright stone set on end by the water. "The Huzoor was—was too much occupied to observe this slave."

"So that is a *shivala*, is it?" interpolated the Englishman hurriedly; "it doesn't look much like a temple."

"We pilgrims call it so, Huzoor, and we worship it."

"Then you are a pilgrim—whither?"

"To the Lake of High Hope, Huzoor," came the answer, and there was a tinge of sadness in the tone. "I have been going thither these twenty years past, but my feet are against me. God made them crooked."

He drew them out of the water as he spoke, and the doctor's professional eye recognised a rare deformity; recognised also that they were unconceivably blistered and worn.

"You will not get to Mānasa Sarovara on those," he said kindly; "they need rest, not travel."

The old man shook his head, and a trace of hurry crept into his voice. "I give them such rest as I can, Huzoor. That is why I sat with them in heaven's healing water; but I must get to Mānasa Sarovara, or my pilgrimage will

be lost—and it is not for my own soul, see you." Then he smiled brilliantly. "And this slave will reach it, Huzoor. Shiv's angels tell me so."

"Shiv's angels?" queried the doctor.

"The birds yonder, Huzoor," replied the old man gravely, pointing to the flock of fishing egrets. "Some call them rice birds, and others egrets, but they come from Shiv's Paradise—one can tell that by their plumes—perhaps that is why the *mems* are so fond of wearing them."

A sudden memory of her face as he had first seen it beneath a snowy aigrette of such plumes assailed the doctor's mind; but it brought a vague dissatisfaction. "*Herodias alba*," he muttered to himself, giving the Latin name of the bird, "more likely to have something to do with dancing away a man's head!" Then a vague remorse at the harshness of his thought made him say curiously: "And why must I leave the *mem* behind if I want to reach the Lake of High Hope?"

"Because she is a mother, Huzoor," came the unexpected reply, followed by deprecating explanation. "This slave has good eyes—he saw the childs' faces on her breast."

Once again the doctor felt that unaccustomed thrill along the roots of his hair. What right had this old man to see—everything?—and to preach at him? A sudden antagonism leapt up in him against all rules, all limitations.

"Well! I don't mean to leave her behind, I can tell you," he said almost petulantly. "When a man has found Paradise——"

"Shiv's Paradise is close to the Lake of High Hope," interrupted the suave old voice.

"D—n Shiv's Paradise!" cried the doctor; then he laughed. "It's no use, brāhman-*jee*, for I suppose you are a brāhman. I'm not going to be stopped by snow or ice. Look here,"—his mood changed abruptly to quick masterful protest—"that would be to give up happiness. Now! what makes you happy? Holiness, I expect, being a pilgrim! high caste! one of the elect! Give that all up, brāhman-*jee*—and—and I'll think about it. And if you'll come over there," he pointed to the low sandhills as he

spoke, "this evening. I'll give you an ointment for those blistered feet of yours—you'll never get to Mānasa Sarovara otherwise, you know."

"I shall get there some time, Huzoor," came the confident reply.

Perhaps the old man came; perhaps he did not. The doctor was far too busy to care, since before daylight failed he found himself face to face with the tightest corner of his life. The promise of the primrose dawn passed before noon. Heavy rain clouds massed themselves into a purple pall, dull, lowering, silent, until, with the close of day, the courage of the coming storm rose in low mutterings.

And then, at last, the rain fell—fell in torrents. It found the regiment—seeking safety from the scourge of cholera—on the march, and disorganised it utterly. With baggage waggons bogged, soldiers already discouraged by dread, all drenched and disordered, there was nothing to be done but keep cool and trust that chance might avert disaster, since no man could hurry up tents that were miles behind.

"There's another man in G company down, sir," said the hospital sergeant, "and the apothecary reports no more room in his ward."

"There's room here," replied the doctor, setting his teeth. "Orderly! put a blanket in that corner and lift Smith to it—he's getting better—he'll do all right."

So yet one more man found a cot and such comfort as skill and strength of purpose could give him, while the thunder crashed overhead and the pitiless rain hammered at the taut tent roof like a drum. One had to shout to make oneself heard.

"Lights! I say, lights! I've been calling for them these ten minutes. Why the devil doesn't someone bring them? I can't see to do anything."

The doctor's voice rang resonantly; but the lights did not come. The waggon with the petroleum tins was hopelessly bogged miles away, and in the confusion no one had thought of lights.

"Thank God for the lightning," muttered the doctor with unwonted piety, as with awful blinding suddenness the

whole hospital tent blazed into blue brilliance, putting out the miserable glimmer of the oil lantern that had been raised from somewhere. In that brief luminous second he could at least see his patients—thirty of them or more. It was not an encouraging sight. The livid look on many faces might be discounted by the lightning, but there was an ominous stillness in some that told its tale.

"Gone! Bring in another man from outside," came the swift verdict and order after a moment's inspection with the oil lantern.

"Beg pardin', sir," almost whined a hospital orderly "but Apothecary Jones has sent to say he's took himself, an' can't go on no more; an' beggin' your pardin, sir, I'm feeling awful bad myself."

The doctor held up the lantern, and its bull's eye showed a face as livid as any in the tent; a face distorted by justifiable horror and fear.

"Go into the quarantine tent, it's up by now, and tell them to give you a stiff-un of rum with chlorodyne in it. You'll be better by-and-by. I've no use for you here."

And he had no use for him—that was true. Shaking hands and trembling nerves were only in the way in a tight corner like this. So, one by one, men fell away, leaving the one strong soul and body to wrestle with a perfect hell.

For the rain never ceased, the thunder went on crashing, the lightning was almost incessant. Thank God for that! Thank God for the inches of running water on the floor of the tent that swept away its unspeakable uncleanlinesses, for the thunder's voice that drowned all other sounds, for the blessed light which made it possible to work.

The very sweepers disappeared at last. No one was left save that one strong soul and body, and even he stood for a second, dazed, irresolute.

"How can this slave help the Protector of the Poor," came a courteous voice beside him, and he turned to see a smile at once familiar and kindly.

"How?" echoed the doctor, stupidly; then he recovered himself. "You can't. You're a brāhman—high caste—all that——"

"This slave has come to help the Huzoor, so that he may be able to reach Mānasa Sarovara," was the quiet insistent reply. "Where shall he begin?"

A sudden spasm almost of anger shot through the strong soul and body as it realised and recollected, vaguely, dimly, as rudely, roughly, it gave no choice save the most menial work. But instant obedience followed, and the doctor, dismissing all other thoughts, plunged once more into the immediate present. The rain pelted, the thunder roared, but every time that blue brilliance filled the tent, it showed two men at work, both doing their duty nobly.

A born nurse! thought the doctor almost remorsefully, as he saw the old man moving about swiftly and remembered those blistered and bleeding feet. "They must hurt you—awfully," he said at last.

"God's healing water cools them, Huzoor," replied the old man, with a radiant smile, "I shall not be delayed in reaching the Lake of High Hope."

So the long night drew down to dawn once more, and dawn brought peace again, even to the cholera camp. An hour and a half passed without a fresh case, and the doctor, realising that the crisis was over, found time to notice the grey glimmer of light stealing through each crack and cranny of the tent. He set the flap aside and looked out. The primrose east was all barred with purple clouds, the distant *jheel* lay in still shiny shadow, but there was no concerted dawn cry of the wild birds, and the flights of whirring wings were isolated, errant.

"The call has come to them, Huzoor," said the suave old voice beside him. "They have gone to Mānasa Sarovara, leaving all things behind them."

The Englishman turned abruptly, almost with an oath, and began to count the costs of the night. Thirty-six dead bodies awaiting burial; but no more—no more!

With the mysterious inconsequence of cholera, the scourge had come, and gone. Seen in the first level rays of the sun, the camp looked almost cheerful, almost bright. A couple of doctors had ridden out from headquarters—there was no more to be done.

"I'll go out for a bit, and shake off the hell I've been

in all night," said the doctor to the chief apothecary, who was recounting his past symptoms with suspicious accuracy. So he went out and wandered round the *jheel*, watching a flock of egrets—*Herodias alba*—that still lingered in its level waters. Were they really Shiv's angels?—or did they dance away men's brains——?

The sun was already high when he returned to camp, looking worn and tired. The hospital orderly whom he had sent to bed with rum and chlorodyne was standing, spruce and alert, at the canteen.

"Feeling better, eh, Green?" he said kindly, as he passed, then added: "All right, I suppose. No more cases or deaths?"

"No, sir," replied the orderly, saluting somewhat shamefacedly. "Leastways, not to count. There's a h'ole man as they found dead outside the camp about quarter of an hour agone, but not being on the strength of the regiment, 'e don't count."

Five minutes afterwards the doctor, his face still more tired and worn, was looking down on the body of his helper. It must have been one of those sudden cases in which collapse comes on from the very first, for no one had seen the old man ill. They had simply found him lying peacefully dead with his blistered deformed feet in a pool of water.

* * * * *

The doctor wrote a letter; it was rather a wild letter about plumes and egrets and the difficulty of distinguishing *Herodias alba* from the stork which brought babies. For the strain of that night in hell, and the subsequent fever brought on by wandering about the *jheel* land when he was outwearied had told even upon his body and soul.

So they sent him to the hills when he began to recover, and being a keen sportsman he did not stop in the Capuas of smart society, but made straight for the solitudes, seeking for something to slay; for he felt a bit savage sometimes. And ever, though he did not acknowledge the fact, his route brought him nearer and nearer to that high Tibetan land where ice and snow reign eternal. Through Garhwāl

and up by Kidarnāth where the new born Ganges issues from a frost-bound cave, until one day he pitched his little six-foot hunter's tent on the other side of the Holy Himalaya and looked down into the wide upland valleys of Naki-khorsum and up beyond them to the great white cone of Kailāsa, the Paradise of Shiva.

A mere iceberg cutting the clear blue sky. How cold, how distant, how utterly unsatisfactory! He stood looking at it in the chill moonlight after his two servants were snoring round the juniper fire on their beds of juniper boughs—looking, and smoking, and thinking.

He had thought much during his three months of solitary wandering, and now the time was coming when thoughts must be translated into action, for his leave was nearly up. Should he go backwards or forwards? Go on to Mānasa Sarovara, or set his face towards lower levels? Should Hope of the mind take the place of Hope of the body? Bah! he was a fool! He would be a sensible man and return. That was his last thought as he rolled himself in his hunter's blanket and lay down to sleep.

But the dawn found him plodding on in front of his two coolies towards that compelling cone of snow. He left the tent at the foot of the next ridge, and that night the last thing he saw was Orion's Sword resting upon the summit of Mount Kailāsa.

Yes! he would go on. He would see if it were true that *Herodias alba* disported its plumes on the waters of the Lake of High Hope.

During the latter part of his wanderings he had, partly owing to the unsettled and hesitating state of his mind, diverged from the pilgrim track; but here, on this last day, he rejoined it, and in more than one place the bones of someone who had fallen by the way, showed amongst the flowers which carpeted every rent in the world's white shroud of snow; showed like streaks of snow itself, so bleached were they by long months of frost.

But the flowers! what countless thousands of them—low, almost leafless, hurrying in hot haste to blossom while they yet had time. And yet how pure, how cold, how colourless had not this mountain-side looked from afar.

Almost as cold as Kailāsa, which, viewed from the height of the pass, seemed barely more significant.

But every foot of descent made a difference, and soon over the rocky ravine it rose stupendous, its great glacier shiny cold, inaccessible. Before long it would overtop the sky and reach High Heaven. No wonder men thought of Paradise!

Down and down, through a mere cleft in the rocks that closed in, shutting out all view. . . .

Then, suddenly, he gave a little gasp and stood still.

So that was the Lake of the Soul's Hope—Mānasa Sarovara! The pure beauty of it sank into him, its rest and peace filled him with content.

A wilderness—a perfect wilderness of bright-hued flowers between the snow slopes and the lake whose blue waters gleamed like sapphires between the diamond icebergs that drifted hither and thither on its breeze-kissed waves.

But not one sign of life; no movement, no noise, save every now and again a far-distant thunderous roar, and a puff of distant white smoke upon some mountain-side telling of a falling avalanche.

Cradled in snow, yet wreathed in flowers; solemn, secure, unchangeable!

It was a marvellous sight. He was glad he had come, for it was a place where one could think—*really* think.

So he stood and thought—really—for a while; and then he took out his watch. Time was waning, for he had to re-climb the pass and rejoin his tent ere sundown. Still there was enough left for him to reach that jutting flower-set promontory, whence, surely the best view of the whole would be obtained.

Yes! decidedly the best! Shiv's Paradise, rising from the water's edge, showed from hence, equal-sided, serene, unassailable, a pure pyramid of ice.

Truly a sight never to be forgotten; a sight well worth a pilgrimage.

And then some swift remembrance made him glance downwards, and he saw before him the bleached skeleton of a man. Something in the attitude of it, the feet hidden

in the lake made him stoop curiously to see what its sapphire surface covered.

What was it?

He stood looking down into the rippling water that whispered and whispered to the flowers ceaselessly, for some time; then he turned and climbed the hill again.

But, even if he had taken anything with him to Mānasa Sarovara, he left it behind him there beside the skeleton of a man with curiously deformed feet. But the blisters had gone.

RETAINING FEES

It is not always on rocks and rapids that the cockle shell of human happiness meets with the direst shipwreck. Often in the quietest backwaters, where no current is, where not a ripple disturbs the still surface, disaster so absolute, so overwhelming comes, that the very tragedy of it sinks out of sight also, unrecognised, unrecorded.

Such a backwater was a little square of roof four pair back, in a tall tenement house in Lucknow, where one blazing hot day in June a buxom woman, with a yellow-skinned baby hitched to her hip outside the voluminous veil of dirty crushed calico, which for the present was mostly in folds about her feet, was haranguing three other women who sat working as for dear life in the hard unyielding shadow of the high walls, which were deemed necessary even here to shut out the possibility of prying eyes.

"What you need, honourable ladies," finished Mussumet Jewuni decisively, "is a 'bannister.'"

"A 'bannister!'" echoed the eldest of the three listeners. "And what new-fangled thing is that?"

She did not slacken a second in her deft twirling of her distaff, neither did the others, despite their questioning eyes, relax their swift business. Indeed, as they sat in the shadows, the three might have served as a model for the Fates, since Khulâsa Khânum span ceaselessly. Aftâba Khânum wound yarn on a circling bamboo frame, and Lateefa Khânum snipped with a very large pair of scissors at the shirt she was making; for, being many years younger than the others, her eyes were still fit for fine back-stitching. Beautiful hazel eyes they were, too: large, soft, full of sunshine and shadow.

Jewuni dismissed one mouthful of betel nut and began on another ere she replied.

"A 'bannister' is a pleader, who, having been across the black water to London, knows new tricks wherewith to confound the old ones. 'Tis the only chance for justice,

ladies. I know of such an one, and could bring him here to receive instruction, and mayhap there would be no need for the honourable ladies to answer in Court."

Khulâsa Khânum's hands froze in horror; she glanced anxiously towards Lateefa. "Talk not like that before the child, woman!" she interrupted, almost fiercely. "No strange man, as thou knowest, comes to this virtuous house, and no woman goes out of it."

Both statements were absolutely true; these women, distant relations, yet bound to each other by the tie of a common poverty, a common wrong, had not set foot beyond that square of roof for years and no men—save those whose interest it was to keep them poor—had ever climbed the steep stair hole which showed like a cavernous shadow in the high back wall.

Yet Jewuni Begum laughed. She was a very different stamp of woman. Her oil-beplastered hair narrowing her forehead beyond even Nature's intention, and the soap curls at her silver and gold tasselled ears were of a fashion which left little doubt as to her moral character; but, being a bottomless receptacle for the gossip of the whole town, owing to her husband's position as a paid tout at the Law Courts, the neighbourhood in general, and even that virtuous roof in particular, had left inquiry and condemnation alone for the present.

"Lo! Khânum!" she giggled, "that is true enough, God knows; yet what avails it for reputation? None. 'Tis a rare joke, and I meant not to tell it thee; still, 'tis too good to be lost. In the Mirza's reply to the last petition sent from this house for direct payment of the pension due to honourable ladies, it is written—my man saw it, and there was laughter among the writers, I will go bail—that the petitioners, being giddy young things, given to wanton ways, it is necessary for the honour of a princely family that they be held under restraint; such money as is due being expended lavishly, aye! and more, in securing the luxury due to gentlewomen of your estate."

Here she herself went off into such chuckles that the yellow baby had to be shifted higher on her shaking side.

The three women ceased working, and looked at each

other helplessly, while underneath their curiously fair skins a flush showed distinctly.

"Did they say that—of us?" asked Aftâba Khânum at last, in a faltering voice. Perhaps it was her occupation of winding hanks without tangle which made her always so keen to have all things clear.

"And of me?" echoed Khulâsa faintly. Her old face had grown very grey, her hands, though they had ceased working, were no longer frozen; they trembled visibly.

Only Lateefa sat silent, a swift yet sullen anger on her still young face.

Jewuni giggled again. "There was no distinction of decency, Khânum. But 'tis too bad, and that is why I spoke of a 'bannister' to confound such old tricks with new ones. However, 'tis no business of mine, only," she paused in her conversation, and, going beside Lateefa, she lowered her voice, "there is no need for stitching shirts till shroud-time comes. There be other ways, as I have told thee before, of earning money, aye! enough even to pay a 'bannister's' fee, and get the truth made known. So, if thou preferest to be as a hooded falcon, seeing nothing of the sport in life, sit and stitch. If not, come to me and claim freedom—in all things."

When she and the yellow baby had gone, silence fell on the desecrated little square of virtuous roof.

Truly it was hard! After a life-time of patient propriety, long years of self-denial involving silence and seclusion even from scant justice, to have all these virtues reft from them in order that wantonness and giddiness and youth might serve as an excuse for withholding their rights! That these rights should be traversed was to their experience no new thing, though to Western ears it may seem inconceivable that even under British rule it is the easiest thing in the world to treat secluded women as these three had been treated. Briefly, for the male head of the family, as guardian, to leave them to starve, while he made merry over their poor pittances of pensions granted to them by Government in consideration of their race, or its good services. No wonder, then, that Khulâsa sat helpless, resorting for comfort to the little rosary she always carried, that

Aftâba's tears ran silently down her withered cheeks, or that Lateefa's sullen anger gave a dangerous look to her still handsome face. So dangerous that fear pierced Aftâba's soft self-pity at last, making her ask anxiously:

"What was it she said to thee privately, Lateefa? Naught worse, surely?"

The darkening of the handsome face was not all anger now. Lateefa rose with a bitter laugh.

"Nay! she but spoke of 'fees' for justice, as if we had aught to pay. Yet something must be done."

"We have done too much already," came Khulâsa's shaking voice. "If we had trusted in the Lord instead of sending petitions there would have been no need for them to tell the lie. If we had waited——"

"Lo! we had waited," put in Aftâba, "and petitions are no new thing. Our fathers made them. They are not like 'bannisters' and strange men. These——"

There was no need for her to explain what these were to that virtuous roof, for at the moment a tentative cough from the stair-hole accompanied by the rhythmic squelching of water in a skin-bag announced the daily visitation of old Shamira, the *bhisti*, who had filled their earthen pots for them for years and years; and in an instant veils were hastily drawn close, faces turned to the wall.

"*Bismillah!*" came the orthodox greeting, for old Shamira knew all about the honourable ladies, and in a way loved them, though he had never once seen them in all the long years.

"*Bismillah! irruhman, niruheem!*" returned the virtuous ones decorously. Only Lateefa, standing in the corner, felt that there was but half a truth in the words. God might be clement in the next world, but he was far from merciful in this. Yet it was not the fault of the world itself; that was fair enough. There was a displaced brick in the corner where she stood, and, profiting by the temporary blindness of her veiled companions, she did what she had done several times on the sly, during the past few weeks—she took advantage of the brick-hole and tip-toe to gain a glimpse of that outside world. It was the veriest glimpse indeed, of purpling shadowy roofs huddled against a flare of sunset

sky, but the dust haze through which she saw it seemed a golden halo of transfiguration, and in a second she had made her choice. She would pay a retaining fee for bare justice to her own womanhood. Jewuni was right! Times had changed. Why should she waste her life clinging to old ways when new freedom was within reach.

Yet there was a startled, half-frightened look both in the sunshine and shadow of her hazel eyes, as she waited, face towards the wall, till the cool sound of pouring water have ceased, she was free to resume her limited life. Limited, indeed! How strange those limitations seemed in the light of her new decision!

But those brief minutes of arrest, due to old Shamira's entry into the feminine cosmogony, had, curiously enough, brought decision to the other two women, for, in truth, Jewuni's story, Jewuni's giggle at the joke, had been the last straw to their patience, the final goad rousing them to action of which, each in her own way, they had been dreaming for long.

They, too, felt that the time was past for temporising, for trimming their sails to suit each other's opinions.

So Khulâsa Khânum's pallid, high-featured face was more like that of one new-dead than ever, when Shamira gone, she returned to work. And, in truth, she had in those few seconds died for ever to this world and its works.

Delicate from her babyhood, saintly from pure suffering, joy had had small part even in her desire, and her resistance to pain had been always half-hearted. For what was even the justice of man worth in comparison with the justice of God? Naturally enough, then, Jewuni's tale of the sorry jest had been more a horror to her than to either of the others, making her turn to the hidden meaning of her thwarted life for comfort. Her retaining fee for justice should be paid where there was no fear of a miscarriage. And in the meantime, while the tyranny of life lasted, she must work—work to the end.

For on her work, practically, those others lived. In all the town no hands could spin a finer thread than old Khulâsa Khânum's. The very spinning jennies of Bombay could not compete with her ceaseless industry; and there

still remained noble folk who clung to the spider's-web muslin of the old times. So her hands twirled faster, more deftly. The rest was with God.

Aftâba Khânum, on the contrary, had decided for the world; not, as Lateefa had done, for the world as it was in these latter days, but for the world as it ought to be, as it used to be. She had a very different strain in her from those other two; from Khulâsa in her spirituality Lateefa in her emotionality. Aftâba, even when things were at their worst, smiled, consoling herself and the roof generally with some unexpected and perhaps extravagant scrap of amusement. A mouthful of pillau concocted out of nothing to season a dry bread dinner, a ridiculous toy made out of rubbish, whereat all laughed. Courtier-born, she loved even the old etiquettes by instinct, while her keen wit could find a clue of an intrigue as deftly as her fingers could disentangle Khulâsa's cobwebs. And, of all three, she kept in closer touch with a world with which she had not quarrelled, despite its injustice towards her. There was, indeed, a certain Uncle Chirâgh who still came to see her, and her only, once or twice a year. A blue-beard dodderer, with a twinkling eye, and a still mellow voice, who sometimes brought quails with him, and spices, so that Aftâba might regale him with one of her best curries; for she was a great cook.

So the spur of Jewuni's retailed insult came as a challenge to Aftâba's sense of propriety. The world might be diseased by novelty, but the foundations were sure. She had been a fool all these years to acquiesce in impersonal petitions with purposeless stamps to them, instead of some graceful tribute, after the older, approved method. True, she had once broached the subject to Jewuni. She had even gone so far as to bring out a certain faded brocaded bag, which was her greatest treasure, and produce therefrom a medal or two, a dozen or more worn letters. Quaint, old-world informations to the reader, that the bearer, Futteh, or Iman, or Hassan, was such and such a worthy person—a gold-spangled record of thanks for service in the Mutiny—the intimation of one Rissildar Tez Khan's death in action; which latter had indeed been the cause of

Aftâba's loneliness. Even (curious survival of friendly days gone, never to return) a few English words, in sprawling, irresponsible, boyish handwriting, to say that the self-same Tez Khan knew the whereabouts of every living creature fit to shoot in the whole countryside!

But Jewuni had scorned the suggestion of sending these to the bigwig with, say, a basket of Aftâba's famous pumpkin preserve, since, alas, oranges stuffed with rupees were out of the question. Indeed, she had said succinctly:

"Keep them till the Day of Judgment. The Lord may look at them, the law will not. For, see, they are not even stamped, and without stamps is no justice possible."

Even then old Aftâba had felt, with dim obstinacy, that it was not law or justice she sought: it was favour! Favour such as the great had to give in a well-ordered world!

And so she, in her turn, came back to the limitations of her life with a decision. Uncle Chirâgh had told her but a week or two before—as luck would have it!—that the whole town was to be in an uproar the very next day over the unveiling of a statue of Malika Victoria. The anniversary of a great day in the heroic annals of the Defence of the Residency—for which, by the way, that gold-spangled gratitude had been given—had been chosen as fitting for the ceremonial. The grounds were to be lit up, fireworks let off, and special messages sent to and from the Queen herself, while the statue would be covered with offerings. Could anything be more opportune for the decorous presentation of a retaining fee?

So next day, while Lateefa Khânum stitched, repenting not at all yet, still with a flutter of her heart, and Khulâsa Khânum, with an odd flutter at her heart also, which kept the colour even from her lips, worked and prayed, Aftâba used the privacy of a tiny kitchen for the preparation of other things than a scanty dinner of herbs. It meant the loss of her only silver bangle, sold on the sly through the market woman who came every morning. It was quite the most valuable thing in the house; yet there was but a farthing or two left by the time the pumpkin preserve, covered with silver leaf, lay in a tinselled rush basket with the precious brocaded bag on the top, and the market woman, bribed

to return for it in the afternoon, had received a generous douceur which would surely ensure its due delivery.

All this took time, and was tiring, to boot; so it was nigh sunset when, after a sleep which had taken her almost unawares in the little cook room, Aftâba came out again to the limited life on the roof. As she did so, the familiar tentative cough of Shamira the *bhisti* on his rounds, accompanied by the squelching of his water-skin, made her step back into the screening wall.

"*Bismillah!*" she said, wondering not to hear the familiar greeting. But old Shamira was staring helplessly at something he had never seen before. It was old Khulâsa Khânum.

"She must be dead," he said, simply, to Aftâba's horrified disbelief. "See! She sits with face unveiled."

And she was dead. Her retaining fee had brought justice swiftly. And Lateefa?

Aftâba, when she realised the emptiness of the roof save for herself and the dead woman, wondered if it was the sight of one who belonged to it slipping downstairs from its virtue that, by its terrible confirmation of wantonness, had sent Khulâsa to seek to a higher tribunal.

As for herself!

That night, when the wailers had gone, promising to return at dawn, and she was left really alone for the first time, she sat wondering what fate her preserved pumpkins would bring. And then she did something she had never done in all her life before. She, too, used the hole left by the displaced brick to gain a glimpse of the world which was doing honour to dead heroes, and to the Queen for whom they died. As she did so the first rockets rose from the unseen Residency to commemorate its brave defenders, and set their stars of glory in high heaven.

Up and up, valiantly, higher and higher, full of the best intentions, they went, typical, so far, of the hands that sent them on their mission. And then?

Then old Aftâba stepped down from her vain vantage, and creeping back to where Khulâsa lay waiting the dawn, put her head down beside hers and wept.

For the stars had fallen, but the dead woman's retaining fee had reached the Mercy Seat.

HIS CHANCE

He sate biting his nails viciously. It was not a habit of his, but, at the moment, the tangle of his nineteen years of life had been too much for him, and he sate before it, helpless yet resentful.

He was trying to write a letter to his mother, his widowed mother far away over the black water in England, to tell her that he had been placed under arrest for cowardice—since that was what it came to in the end!—and yet not to hurt her, not to blame her, whom every bit of his being blamed. Why had she brought him up a nincompoop? Why had she been so afraid of him?—poor little mother whose nerves had been shattered once and for all by her hero husband's death ere her child was born. Yet that father had been brave to recklessness. . . .

The boy's head went down on his arm. Something like a sob quivered through the hot air. For it was hot, though the sun was but an hour old, in the little grass-thatched bungalow which boasted of but one room, two verandahs, and two corresponding slips of dark enclosed space; one a bathroom, the other full of saddles, corn, empty boxes—briefly, the factotum's go-down. The whole house being nothing but a square mushroom set down causelessly in a dusty plain and guarded by two whitewashed gate-pillars, one of which bore the legend, on a black board, "Ensign Hector Clive, 1st Pioneers."

A good name, Hector Clive, and yet the boy's head was down on his arm. Why had he been such a cursed fool?

A brain-fever bird was hard at work in a far-off *sirus* tree. He could see it in his mind's eye—green, with its red head held high among the powder-puff flowers, as it gave its incessant cry with the regularity of a coppersmith's hammer—for, though he had been but one year in the country, he knew all its birds, and beasts, and flowers; aye! and had a good smattering of its lingo also—it was

that, partly, which had made him—what was it—afraid—or—or cautious?

His brain was in such a whirl he could not tell which. And he had no one to whom he could talk; not a friend in the whole regiment, for he was shy. That was why he was living alone in this cursed shanty where the centipedes and snakes, too, sometimes (but he was not afraid of them, or of any animal, thank heaven), fell from the cloth ceiling, and the sparrows (poor devils, after all they were only making their nests) dropped straws over one's letters. That one had made a blot—like a tear-mark—or was it, indeed . . .?

He cursed again under his breath, and a rigid obstinacy came to his face.

Like his name, it was a good enough face, though curiously young even for his young age. The great height of his forehead, it is true, took away from its breadth, and the short-sighted blink of the eyes set so close upon the high narrow nose prevented their piercing clearness from being seen. On the lower part of his face, hair had scarcely begun to show itself. All was callow, immature; yet the square chin showed stiff and strong enough.

There should, at least, be no suspicion of tear marks, so he took a fresh sheet: and then the thought struck him. He would write two letters. One to the dear little Mother who had devoted herself to him—him only—ever since he was born; the other to the woman who had spoiled him and his life, whose timidity had accentuated his birth-legacy of fear. It would do him good to have it out with himself and with Fate—not with Her—no! never with Her!

So this was what he wrote, and left lying on the table when an orderly came to summon him to the Colonel:

> "Dear Mother,—It has come at last! I always knew it must come if you would make a soldier of me, just because my father was one! Why didn't you think? Why didn't you know? Poor Mother! I'm sorry to write all this. How could you dream I have felt more or less of a coward all my life, when *he* was so brave!
>
> "And then you made me worse—you know you

did. I wasn't allowed to risk things like the other boys did; because I was your only one. Ah! I don't blame you, but it was rough on me. I should have made an excellent parson, I expect. And yet I'll be damned—this isn't really for your eyes, mother darling—if I can see what good I should have done if I had ordered that Sepoy under arrest? The men wouldn't have obeyed orders. I saw murder in their eyes. I've seen it for a long time, and I haven't dared to say so—haven't dared to warn those who should be warned for fear of being thought a coward —Isn't that cowardice in itself? Oh, Mother, Mother! Well, it was very simple. A Sepoy was cheeky over these greased cartridges; actually threatened to shoot me if I ordered him under arrest, and—I—you see I know a lot of their lingo, and I understand—I was afraid to do what I ought to have done—chanced it. Of course it doesn't read as bare as that in the Adjutant's report—but I am under arrest. Not that it matters. It must have come sooner or later—for I'm a coward—that is what I am—a coward. . . ."

The words, still wet, stared up into the baggy cloth ceiling, and the sparrows dropped straws over them while Ensign Hector Clive was being interviewed by his Colonel. He sate stolid, acquiescing in every word of blame; and yet he was obstinate.

"I don't see, sir, what good it would have done," he began drearily, when the Colonel stopped him with a high hand.

"Now, I won't have a word of that sort, Mr. Clive," he said severely. "There is enough of that silly talk amongst civilians, and I won't have it amongst the officers of my regiment. It is as good a regiment as any in India, and I'll stake——"

Here, feeling some lack of dignity in what he was about to say, he stood up, and the lad standing up also, overtopped his senior by many inches. Something suggestive in his still lanky length seemed to strike the Colonel. "I'll tell you what it is, Clive, you live too much alone. You're

altogether too—too—why! I don't believe you even had a cup of tea before you started. There! I was sure of it. Absolute suicide! How can you expect, in this climate—and with a Colonel's wigging before you—Really too foolish—my wife shall give you one now—she's in the verandah with the boy—and—and, of course, I can't promise—but you—you shall have your chance—if—if possible."

The—lad—for he was but that—murmured something unintelligible. Perhaps to his dejected mind, another chance seemed to be but another opportunity of disgracing himself.

"How very shy he is," thought the tall slim woman who gave a cup of tea into his reluctant hand and sent Sonnie round to him with the toast and butter. "I must get you to give my small son a lesson, Mr. Clive," she said, smiling, trying to make conversation. "He was telling me all sorts of dreadful things he has heard—so he says—from Budlu, his bearer, and that he was frightened. And I told him a soldier's son never could be frightened at anything. Isn't that true?"

Ensign Hector Clive turned deadly pale. The child standing, with the plate of toast and butter, looked up at him confidently, as children look always where they feel there is sympathy.

"But you are flightened, aren't you?" he asked.

There was an instant's silence; then the answer came, desperately true: "Yes! I am—but then I'm a coward—that's what I am—a coward!"

You might have heard a pin drop in the pause. Then something in the wise, gentle face of the Colonel's wife broke down the barriers.

"Ah! you don't know——" he began; and so with a rush it all came out.

The Colonel's wife sate quite still; she was accustomed to confidences, and even when they did not come voluntarily she had the art of beguiling them. The art also of comforting the confider; and so when the lad's face had gone into his hands with his last words, as he sate—his elbows on his knees—the picture of dejection, she just rose gently,

and came over with soft step to where he was. And she laid a soft hand on either of his lank long-fingered ones and pulled them apart. So, standing, smiled down upon him brilliantly—confidently.

"I don't believe it!" she said, "I don't believe a word of it! You'll be brave—oh! so brave, when your chance comes. Now, my dear, dear boy——" she looked at him as if he had been her son—"go away and forget all this nonsense. And see! Come back at dinner time and tell me before dinner that you've obeyed orders and haven't even thought about it."

She stood and waved her hand at him as he rode away in the blare of sunlight. Her voice echoing through the hot dry air reached him faintly as he turned out of her garden into the dust of the world beyond. "Till dinner-time—remember!"

* * * * *

Remember! The memory of those words came back to her idly as she sate clasping her baby to her breast, while Sonnie, wearied out with fear, slept in her lap, and her one disengaged hand busied itself in fanning a half-delirious man who lay on a string bed set in the close darkness. Dinner time! Yes, it must be about dinner time, for through a chink in the door you could see the sun flaring to his death in the west.

What had happened? She shuddered as she thought of it. What had come first, of all the horrors of that long hot May day? She could not piece it together. All that she knew was that someone had taken pity on the women and the children. And that they were all huddled together in that one room waiting till darkness should give a chance of escape; for the hut was built against an old ruin through which some underground passage gave upon ground not quite so sentry-warded as the barrack square in front. She could hear the familiar words of command, the clank of arms as they changed guard, and she shuddered again. Aye! the women and children might be safe, even if the almost hopeless stratagem failed; but what of the man—her husband—the only one, so far as she knew, of all the

officers of the regiment who had escaped the massacre on the parade ground? How had he been saved? She scarcely knew. She remembered his running back like a hare—yes! he, the bravest of men—all bleeding and fainting, to gasp some words of almost hopeless directions for her safety. And then old Imân Khân—yes! it had been he—faithful old servant! Why had she not remembered before? For there he was, his bald head bereft of its concealing turban, keeping watch and ward at the door.

What a ruffian he looked, so—poor, faithful Imân Khân!

Hush! a voice from outside, a reply from the bald-headed watcher within. More questions, more replies, both growing in urgency in appeal. Then a pause and retreating footsteps.

"What is it, Imân Khân?" she questioned dully, as the old man stole over to her and laid his forehead in the dust.

"What this slave has feared, has waited for all the hours," he whispered, whimperingly. "They know—Huzoor——" he pointed to the bed. "Or, at least, they have suspicion that a man is here. And they must search—they will search—or kill. I have sent them to await the Huzoor's decision."

She stood up, still clasping her babe, the boy slipping, half-asleep, to the ground, and looked round at those other women—those other children who had lost their all. And hers lay here. . . .

"They must come," she said in a muffled voice. Then she bent over her husband. "Will!" she whispered, bringing him back from confused, half-restful dreams, "the Sepoys say they must search—or—or kill—them all. We will hide you—if we can."

If we can! Was it possible, she wondered, feeling dead, dead at heart, as the door opened wide, letting in the sunlight and showing a group of tense womanhood, a bed whereon, huddled up asleep or awake, lay the children deftly disposed to hide all betraying contours.

"Huzoor! salaam!" said the tall *subahdâr*, drawing himself up to attention, and the search party of four followed suit.

How long that minute seemed. How interminable the

sunlight. Ah! would no one shut out the light, and why did Sonnie move his hand? . . .

"Huzoor! Salaam!"

Oh! God in heaven! were they going? Was the door closing? Was the blessed darkness coming? . . .

It was utter darkness, as, her strength giving way, she fell on her knees beside the bed, burying her face upon her children, her husband.

"Will! Will!" she whispered.

A faint sigh came from the watching women. So Fate had been kind to her—her only. . . .

One who had seen her husband shot down before her very eyes rose slowly, and taking her baby from the bed, moved away, rocking it in her arms almost fiercely. So, in the grim intensity of those first seconds, the sound of further parley at the door escaped them.

Then, in the ensuing pause, old Imân Khân's bald head was in the dust once more, his voice, scarce audible, seemed to fill the room.

"Huzoor! They have seen. He must go forth or they will kill—all."

The words, half-heard, seemed to rouse the wounded man to his manhood. He raised himself in bed, he staggered to his feet; so stood, swaying unsteady, yet still a man. "All right—I'll go—Let me out, quick—quick——"

But someone stood between him and the door. It was Ensign Hector Clive. His face was pale as death, his hands twitched nervously, but in the semi-darkness his eyes blazed, his chin looked square and set.

"No, sir," he said quietly, "this is my chance. Look here! I ran and hid in the passage-way when the others—died like men—I couldn't help it—perhaps if they had had the chance I had—but that's nothing!—nothing! I heard—I understand their lingo. They don't know you're here, sir—only a man—let me be a man—for once. It is my chance——"

His eyes sought the Colonel's wife in bitter appeal.

Swift as thought she answered it. Her hand was on her husband's shoulder to hold him back, for she saw in

a flash what others might not see—a martyrdom of life, soul warring with frail flesh, for this boy.

"Let him go, Will," she whispered hoarsely. "As he says, it is his chance."

There was a faint stir amongst the listeners. The Colonel shook himself free from his wife's detaining hand. The code of conventional honour was his, in all its maddening lack of comprehension.

"Stand back, please—and you, Mr. Clive, obey orders—I—I——" He reeled and would have fallen, but for the bed against which he sank. His wife was on her knees beside him.

"Let him go, Will. It is his chance, give it him, for God's sake!"

There was no answer. Unconsciousness had come to bring the silence which gives consent, and she stood up again, stepped to the lad and laid her lips on his forehead.

"Thank you, dear—in the name of all these—thanks for a brave deed."

The blood surged up to his face. A boyish look of sheer triumph transfigured it as he paused for an instant to throw off his coat and tighten his waistband.

"I shall have my chance, too," he cried exultantly, "for I was always a good runner at school!"

Aye! a good runner, indeed! With the wild whoop of a schoolboy at play, he was across the barrack square, untouched. Once over that low wall in front and he would be in cover. He rose to the leap lightly, and for an instant he showed in all the pathetic beauty of immature strength, all the promise of what might lie hidden in the future, against the red flare of the sunlit sky, against the glorious farewell which is true herald of the rising of another day. Then he threw his arms skywards and fell, shot through the heart.

He had had his chance!

THE FLATTERER FOR GAIN

Prem Lal, census enumerator, raised to that fleeting dignity by reason of his being a "middle fail" student (as those who have at least gone up for the Middle School examination style themselves in India), paused in his ineffectual attempt to write with a fine steel nib on the fluttering blue paper held—without any backing—in his left hand, and, all unconsciously, gave the offending pen that sidelong, blot-scattering flick which the native reed requires when it will not drive properly.

Then he coughed a deprecating cough, and covered the previous act—natural enough in one whose ancestors, being of the clerkly caste, had spent long centuries in acquiring and transmitting it—by displaying his Western culture in another way.

"Now for the next 'adult' or 'adulteress' in this house," he said pompously in polyglot.

The grammatical correctness of his genders passed unchallenged by his half-curious, half-awe-stricken audience. The blue paper, ruled, scheduled, classified, contained an unknown world to that patriarchal party assembled in the sleepy sunshine which streamed down on the roof set—far above the city, far above Western civilisation—under the sleepy sunshiny sky; so it might well hold stranger things to its environment than untrustworthy feminines.

"There is the grandfather's father, Chiragh Shah, Huzoor," replied a man of about thirty who, standing midway between the real householder and his grandsons, had assumed the responsibility of spokesmanship in virtue of his possibly combining old wisdom and new culture. He used the honorific title "Huzoor" not to Prem Lal—whom he gauged scornfully to be a mere schoolboy, and a Hindoo idolator to boot—but to the blue paper which represented the alien rulers, who were numbering the people for reasons best known to themselves.

A stir came from the door chink behind which the females of the family were decorously hiding their indignant anxiety.

"Yea! let the old man go forth," shrilled a voice to which none in that household ever said nay. "He is past his time—let them take his brains if they will, and leave virtuous women alone. Who are we, to be registered as common evil walkers?"

Even Prem Lal grew humble instantly.

"Nay! mother," he said apologetically, in unconscious oblivion of his own previous classification. "The Sirkar suggests no impropriety. We seek but to know such trivials as age—sex—if idiot, cripple, spinster, adult or adult——"

"Let Chiragh Shah go forth to him," interrupted the hidden oracle with opportune decision. "Lo! his midday opium is still in his brain. Let it bring peace to him and the eater thereof."

The chink widened obediently, disclosing a fluttering and scattering of dim draperies. So, roused evidently from a doze in the inner darkness, a very old man shuffled out into the sunshine, then stopped, blinking at it as if, verily, he found himself in some new and unfamiliar world.

"The Sirkar hath sent for thee, grandad," bawled the appointed spokesman in his ear. "They need——"

But the words were enough. The blank, dazed look passed into a sudden alacrity which took years from the old body as it sat it a-trembling with eagerness.

"The Sirkar," he echoed. "It is long since I, Chiragh Shah—long since——" He relapsed as suddenly into dreams. His voice failed as if following the suit of memory, but he supplied the lack of both by a smile which spoke volumes.

For it was the smile of a sycophant as unblushingly false as the teeth which it displayed—teeth which were square, dicelike blocks of ivory, unvarying in size, strung together on a bold gold wire, and hung—Heaven knows how—to his toothless gums.

"Sit down, *meeân-jee*," said the census enumerator, politely, for the heart-whole artificiality of the smile

admitted of no breach of manners. "We seek but honourable names and ages."

So they brought the old man a quaint red lacquered stool, which had once carried a certain dignity in its spindled back rail by reason of its having come into the family with some far dead and gone bride—Chiragh Shah's own, mayhap!—and there he sate, still with that look of urbane smiling alacrity rejuvenating his wrinkled face.

There was a hint, beneath the semi-transparency of his frayed white muslin robe, cut in a bygone fashion, of very worn, very old brocade fitting closely to the very thin, very old body, and the embroidered cap set back from his high, narrow forehead showed a glint here and there of frayed old worn gold thread.

"His name is Chiragh Shah," yawned the spokesman, adding in a bawl, "How old art thou, dâdâ—the Sirkar is asking?"

There was a little pause, and wintry though the sun was, its shine seemed to filter straight through all things, denying a visible shadow even to the blue paper.

"How old?" came the urbane voice, speaking with a long-lapsed precision of polish. "That is as God wills and my lord chooses."

Prem Lal glanced doubtfully at the schedules. They did not provide for such politeness, so he appealed mutely to the spokesman, who replied by roundabout assertion:

"He was of knowledgeable years when the city fell—wast thou not, dâdâ?" The explanatory shout brought keen intelligence to the hearer.

"Aye! it was from the palace bastion I watched the English. Half the city watched them that 14th of September. . . ." Here once more voice and memory lapsed awhile. But Prem Lal's history was at least equal to the more recent event of that memorable date, so his pen grew glib in ciphering. "Taking knowledgeable age as ten," he commenced rapidly, "with deduction of years 1857 from present epoch 1881——"

His face darkened. "He has the appearance of more age than thirty-five," he began dubiously, when the suave old voice picked up the lost thread of recollection.

"Lake sahib came to our court two days after, and the King, being blind, saw not that the English face was no more merciful than the French face which had been driven away, so there were rejoicings."

"He means the day which began the hundred years of tyranny," suggested the spokesman; and Prem Lal's pen had already substituted 1805 for 1857, when the voice of her who had to be obeyed came sternly from the chink. "Put him down as a hundred, boy!" it said scornfully. "Meat is tough when the sacrifice is past its prime, anyhow, so what does it matter?"

The next question presented no difficulty. No one in that house could be aught but a descendant of the Prophet, so the answer "Syyed" sprang to every lip with chill, almost scornful, pride.

"Profession or trade," continued Prem Lal, mechanically; "gold-thread embroiderer, I suppose, like the rest of you."

It was a natural supposition, seeing that the high-bred, in-bred household had for years past—since, in fact, courts were abolished in Delhi—taken to this, the trade of so many ousted officials.

"Huzoor! no!" replied the spokesman with a yawn, for the proceedings were becoming uninteresting to him. "He is before that. He does nothing—he never did anything."

"Gentleman at large," hesitated on Prem Lal's pen; there an ephemeral conscientiousness born of his ephemeral dignity made him appeal to the old man himself.

Chiragh Shah smiled courteously. His hands trembled themselves tip to tip.

"My profession," he echoed. "Surely I am Chaplaoo—of inheritance and choice," he adder alertly.

"Chaplaoo!" That was clear enough to Prem Lal in the vernacular, but how was it to be translated for the blue paper which must be written in English as an exposition of learning that might lead to further employment?

Being prepared for such emergencies by a pocket dictionary, he looked the word up—a proceeding which revived interest in the audience, notably behind the chink,

whence the magisterial voice was heard remarking that it was no wonder the Sirkar wanted brains if it was so crassly ignorant as not to know what chaplaoo meant!

This flurried Prem Lal into premature decision. "Chaplaoo," he quoted under his breath, "a fawner—ha! I see! One who keepers the fawn—forester—huntsman—Am I not right?" he translated with a preparative flick of the steel pen.

The even ivory smile was clouded by an expression too blank for resentment.

"The Sirkar mistakes. This slave kept no animals."

Prem Lal dived hurriedly into further equivalents. "Parasite—backbiter—one who bites backs! Ah! I see—bug—etc."

"This slave, as he has said, kept no kind of animals whatever," repeated Chiragh Shah, with a suave, unconscious dignity which appeased even the rising storm of virtuous indignation behind the chink. "He was—if the Sirkar prefers the title—Chapar-qunatya, by inheritance and choice."

The rolling Arabic word had a soothing sound, and a hush fell with the sunshine even on Prem Lal's search after a common factor between East and West.

"Toad eater! eater of toads——" he began with doubt in the suggestion; "lick spittle—one who licks the spittle?"

"Eater of toads, licker of spittle," shrilled the voice of the chink. "Dost come here defiling an honourable house—and I who purvey its food—with such vile calumny—I——"

"Peace, mother," soothed a softer voice; "such things do no harm save to the speaker. What you spit at the sky falls on your own face!"

"Aye!" assented a ruder voice, "and is he not a Kyasth (clerk)—lie he must or his belly will burst."

The word "lie" gave the agitated enumerator a fresh clue, and the pages of the dictionary fluttered as if in a full gale.

"Lie—liar—slanderer——"

There was no connection in his tone; but the suggestion being at least plausible to his audience, the question was

referred loudly to old Chiragh Shah, who was beginning to nod with combined sunshine and opium drams.

"Lie?" he asked, with a return of that swift alacrity. "Surely, I lied always. Yea! from the beginning to the end."

He used the high-sounding Arabic word for liar, and so sent Prem Lal a-fluttering once more. Ere he had lit on the correct gutteral, old Chiragh Shah's set smile had changed into a real one. The slack muscles of his neck stiffened; he flung out his right hand airily.

"Hush!" said the two smallest boys on the roof in sudden interest; "dâdâ is going to talk."

He was.

"Lies!" he began, and there was tone in the old voice, "and wherefore not if it is a real lie and not a bungle? But I never was a bungler. I know my profession too well—even at the last—yea, at the very end they had to come to me for artifice—for subterfuge. It was the last lie—to count as a real lie."

He paused, one of the boys had crept round to him and now laid a compelling hand of entreaty on the old man.

"Tell us of it, dâdâ."

The spokesman looked at the enumerator as if for orders.

"It may elucidate the meanings," muttered the Middle-fail to himself.

So in the stillness of that sunshiny roof, set so far above the workaday world, they sate listening.

"Yea! it was the last lie that was worth the telling. Yet I was past my prime like the court itself. For none, save those who saw, knew the heart-burnings, the bitterness of those last years. King but in name, the very court officials drifting away to other allegiance. And Lake sahib had been so full of promise on that first September day, when the Frenchman was driven away because, forsooth! he had made the blind Shah Alum a prisoner in his own palace——" There was a pause in the thin old cadences, and a flitting shadow fell on the sun-saturate listeners from a wheeling kite overhead.

"And what was Bahadur Shah but a prisoner, too? What matter—the Huzoors gave him bread after their

fashion and he was unfaithful to the salt of it. That was not well—one must be loyal even to a lie! So after the mad midsummer dream of recovered kingship in the palace—such a mad dream—we who dreamed it knew at the time that we were dreaming—came that second September day when the English returned to Delhi. We did not watch them, then; we were hiding in the tombs—Humayon's tomb without the wall.

"It was the night after Hudson *sahib bahadur* had wiled away the King by fair promises—aya! the Huzoor knew the trick of those well—but the Princes were still hiding—and many a better man, too.

"My son for one. He was wounded to the death. Ah! I knew it—though the brave lad—he was the son of mine old age—steadied his breath and smiled when I spoke to him. But there was little leisure for words with treachery to right and treachery to left, and none to trust fairly. For the world had changed even then, and there were but one or two of my kind left, and I was out of favour. Too old for the new court—too old for new pleasures. And the young Prince—lo! how he used to laugh at my worn flatteries—had many pleasures—so many of them that he took some of them from other folks' lives; thus he had foes. Aye! but friends, too, for he came nearer to kingliness than his brothers. And my son loved him.

"So when the danger came, and I knew by chance of the plot to kill the Prince as he slept, and gain the reward set on him by the English, I had no choice. Yet I dare trust no one in the skulking crowd which crept about the shadows of the old tomb. In those days it was every one for himself, and the Prince had scant following at best. And he lay drunk with wine and women, out of bravado partly to the skulkers—in one of the half-secret upper rooms. But I knew which, and I remember it so well. The grey spear point of the distant Kut showed through its open arch.

"And below, in a far nook of the crypt, where there was a secret swinging panel in the red sandstone wall, known only to the old, my son lay dying.

"He steadied his breath as I stooped over him, and

whispered that he would soon be fighting for his Prince again.

"'Soon, my son,' I answered, waiting as he smiled. For I knew the silence was at hand—silence from all things save the breathing that would only steady into death.

"We, my servant and I, lifted him easily. He was but a lad, though he would have grown to greater stature than the Prince. His head lay so contentedly on my shoulder as I went backward up the stair, telling those who stood aside to let us pass, that he was better and craved the fresher air of the roof. 'Better? Aye! he is better, or soon will be, old fool,' said one with a laugh. Then clattered noisily after his companions, so noisily that the echo of the winding staircase sent their scornful mirth back to me. 'He will be dead—like someone he followed—by morning.'

"Before morning, if I did not fail, thought I, silently, as, searching the shadows, we sought the Prince's hidden room. There was a youth ever with the Prince—a baby-faced, frightened, womanly thing—yet faithful as far as in him lay. Him, I caught by the throat. 'They would kill thee, too,' I said; 'better take the chance of life. If fate be kind, ere dawn discovers the deceit, *he* will be fit to fly.'

"So after my servant and I, wailing at our lack of wisdom, had carried the Prince down, face covered as one to whom worse sickness had come suddenly, I crept to the upper room again. It was growing late, but the grey spear-head of the Kut still showed beyond the open arch as I covered the lad's face, lest, for all his gay dress, the murderers might see too much.

"'Dream thou art fighting for the Prince, sonling!' I said, knowing he was past even the steadying of his breath for an answer; but the smile had lingered on his face.

"Then I covered my face also, and, bidding the baby-faced one escape to the crypt as soon as it was possible, sate as a servant might have sate, at the turning of the ways from the stair head.

"Would those who were to come be familiar or strange? I wondered. The latter, most likely, since Chiragh Shah,

the Chaplaoo, had long since passed from court life, almost from remembrance.

"They were strange; as they challenged me, I drew the cloth from my face without fear.

"'The Prince's room!' they cried, dagger-point at my breast. But that could not be. There must be no suspicion, only certainty, only soothed certainty. 'I have been waiting to show it to my lords,' I answered. 'Lo! he sleeps sound—yea! he sleeps sound, his face toward the Kut.'

"So, with smooth words, I led them in the dark——"

The memory of the darkness seemed to fall as darkness itself on the old brain, and Chiragh Shah sate silent in the sunshine for a few seconds. When he spoke again, it was as if years had passed. "It was the last lie that was worth the telling," he said, almost triumphantly.

"And a good lie, too," came the shrill voice from behind the door chink. "See you, boy!—call the old man by his right name in your paper, or may God's curse light on you for ever!"

Thus adjured, Prem Lal, who, throughout the whole tale, had been fluttering his dictionary from one synonym to another, suggested sycophant; that was, he explained, one who flatters and lies for personal profit.

"Profit!" echoed the voice. "Small profit dâdâ gained. Was not the Prince killed with his brothers next day by Hudson Sahib; so there was no one left even to reward the old man?"

"Save God," suggested Prem Lal, piously trying to escape somehow from the dilemma.

"And there is gain, and gain," admitted the spokesman, combining new and old, east and west.

"Hush!" said one of the two small boys again; "dâdâ is going to talk—he may know——"

So once more the old voice rose in unconscious apology for the difficulty of condensing what etomologists call his life history into a census paper.

"Yea, it was good, and hard—yet not so hard as the first. *That* never left me, despite the long years."

It seemed, indeed, as if it had not, for something of

childlike complaint came into the old voice. "It was my first day at court. Mother had cut my father's khim-khab robe—crimson with gold flowering—to fit me, despite her tears. Her eyes were heavy with them when she kissed me; but I had no fear for all I was so young. I knew the women's bread depended on my tongue—though it was my heritage also to be Chaplaoo.

"And the King was pleased. Mother had tied my turban so tall and he laughed at that. It was out in the garden, he under the gilt canopy, the nobles round and beyond the flowers, and birds fluttering among the roses.

"And I was standing beside the king, and he was laughing—for I knew my part.

"Then the fluttering came closer, closer, and lo! a bird settled on my wrist. It was Gul-afrog—I had left it with my sister, but it had followed me—for we loved each other. So, on my wrist it sate joyful, and salaamed, as I had taught it, drooping its pretty wings.

"Then the King cried, 'How, now, whose pretty bird is this?' and someone laid a warning hand upon my shoulder. But I knew before what I must say if I was to stand in father's place. I knew! I knew!

"'It is yours, my king.'

"So I said, kneeling at his feet! 'It is yours, it is yours,' and Gul-afrog had been with me since it fell out of the bulbul nest in the rose tree. Then they brought a golden cage . . ." The old man sate staring out into the sunshine in silence, and only the littlest of the two boys wept softly.

"We will call him 'Flatterer for Gain,'" said Prem Lal, in desperate decision, and perhaps the description came as near to old Chiragh Shah's profession as was possible in a census schedule.

A MAIDEN'S PRAYER

"That is over! Thanks to Kâli Ma!" sighed Ramabhai, fanning herself vigorously as the last man shambled, a trifle sheepishly, from the inner apartment. She was a stoutish Bengâli lady, with red betel-stained lips and smooth bandeaux of shiny black hair. Good-looking, good-natured, at the moment distinctly excited as she went on garrulously. "Muniya! down with the curtain, there is no further use for it now that crew has gone! And to think that the master will have to give each one of them five rupees! And for what? Forsooth! for the first seeing of such a bride as not one of them ever saw before. Lo! Shibi, marriage-monger!" Here she turned accusingly on one of the women who were busy unveiling themselves, chattering the while with shrill voices. "Hast no mind at all? Thou mightst have found newer words for thy description of my daughter!—'beautiful as a full moon, symmetrical as a cart-wheel, graceful as a young goose.' What are these for perfection? And thou didst use the same last week for Luchi Devi's girl, who is pock-marked and blind of an eye! But there! 'What's a fowl to one who has swallowed a sheep.' Parbutti,"—here she transferred her attentions to a young girl who was seated on a cushion resting her face in her henna-dyed hands, as if she felt dazed or tired—"an thou hast a grain of sense have a care of that nose-ring thy paternal auntie lent for the occasion or there will be flies in the pease porridge—there always is in that family. Yea! it is well over; and thank the gods, the priest found good omen in the morning watches, so I have not to dine the creatures. Fish curry and kid pillau is too much to pile on the getting of a trousseau; yet one must have meats at a wedding feast, if one in Sakta; and the bridegroom's folk are strict. As for clothes, I tell you, sisters, that 'boycotts' is well enough to play with every day, but when it comes to

weddings and tinsel, 'tis a different matter. Kâli Ma! what a price for *kulabatoon*! Parbutti! an thou canst not remember that thou hast on thee four hundred rupees worth of Benares *khim-kob*, go put on the old Manchester. Thank Heaven! 'Boycotts' is not so old yet, but one has stores left to come and go upon! Yea! Yea! A wedding is a great strain on a mother; and then there is the parting with my daughter, too—my sweeting, my little lump of delight——"

Here Ramabhai discreetly dissolved into regulation tears, mingled with sharp sobs and little outcries. It came easily, for she was really devoted to Parbutti, the little bride, who, in truth, looked distractingly pretty, all swathed in scarlet gold-flowered silk gauze, and hung with jewels galore.

Her grave open-eyed face looked, perhaps, a trifle stupid and obstinate, but there could be no question of its beauty.

"Mother!" she said seriously, "there is a smell of smoke—the tall one in the black coat smelt of it, and it is defilement. Had we not better pacify the gods?"

"Hark to her!" exclaimed Ramabhai, drying her facile tears triumphantly. "Saw you ever such a saint? He who gets my Parbutti is certain of salvation."

Parbutti sate silent. She did not even blush, though that is allowed to a Bengâli bride. But for all her outward calm she was inwardly quivering all over; and small wonder if she was! After long years spent, not like an English girl, in ignorance and innocence of matrimony, but in matter-of-fact expectation of it, that one great event in woman's life was close at hand. It had been delayed almost beyond propriety by the difficulty of finding a high-caste husband. For her father, though a Kulin Brahman, was sufficiently westernised not to hold with the caste habit of marrying a daughter to what may be called a professional husband: that is, to a Kulin who already possesses a score or two of wives. A suitable student had, however, been found at last, and the feminine portion of the household had plunged hysterically into all the suggestive ceremonials of a high-class Bengâli marriage. Even the widows let

their blighted fancies dwell on kisses and blisses; so, feeling vicariously the sensuous pleasures of bridedom, vied with happier women in drugging the girl with sweets and scents, and secret whisperings of secret delights. The whole atmosphere was enervating, depraving; but Parbutti took all the gigglings and titterings gravely as her right. For this was the consummation of her hopes ever since, as a child of five, she had been taught to worship the gods, to pray for an amorous husband, and curse any woman who might try to win love from her.

"Look! how the little marionette scowls over it," the women had tittered as they watched her, a bit of a naked baby, going through the formula of the Brata, as it is called. "Truly no co-wife will dare to enter her house." And certainly her energy was prodigious.

"Mâta! Mâta! Mâ! Keep my co-wife far—
"Shiv! Shiv! Shiv! Grant she may not live—
"Pot! Pot! Pot! Boil her hard and hot—
"Broom! Broom! Broom! Sweep her from the room—
"Mud! Mud! Mud! Moist thee with her blood—
"Bell! Bell! Bell! Ring her soul to hell—"

and so on through every common and uncommon object on God's earth—and beneath it!

The childish body had swayed to the rhythm of the chant; the childish voice had risen clear in denunciation; the childish soul had given its consent to every wish; for Parbutti was nothing if not serious.

The very cantrips of the Sakta cult to which her parents —and some fifty millions of other Bengâlis—belonged, were to her so many indispensable realities.

She, as an unmarried girl, ate her plateful of sacrificial meat contentedly, though her mother refused it. She sate wide-eyed, solemn, acquiescent, when after long fasting the whole family waited in the dead of the night till the auspicious moment for sacrifice arrived, and in the silence the only sound was an occasional piteous, half-wondering bleat of the miserable victim—a pet goat, mayhap! She did not wink an eye when the consecrated scimitar curved downwards, a jet of red, red bubbling blood spurted into

the dim light, and a sort of sob from the dying and the living alike told that atonement was made.

That sort of thing did not make her or any of the other women quiver; yet they were affectionate, emotional, kind-hearted. "Without shedding of blood is no remission of sin," is a Pauline text; but it was theirs also. Graven by age-long iteration in their limited minds and lives was the dogma that the Blood is the Life thereof. There was but one Sacrament; the Sacrament of Blood. Marriage was secondary, but cognate to it, of course; that was because it was the Gate to Birth and Death, through which none pass without the Great Sacrifice. So they clothed the bride in scarlet, and smeared her forehead with vermilion. It was this stability of inner thought which enabled the women to be so untiring in their variants of its outward application. All the bathings and anointings and sooth-sayings had this unchangeable dogma as foundation. So the round of ritual went on, the drums throbbed in unending rhythm, the conches blared in deafening yells, the whole house was full of the rustlings and bustlings of womenfolk. It must surely have been a wedding which made Babu Kishub Chander Sen write the ponderous dictum: "Man is a noun in the objective case, governed by the active verb woman."

Parbutti's father, being a sensible man, removed himself as much as possible from the ebullient atmosphere; perhaps it was as well, since he was a light in the Nationalist party, and the ceremonials of a Sakta wedding do not go well with talk of political rights and wrongs, of education, and equality, and exotic tyranny.

Even Parbutti's solemnity was not quite proof against the silly suggestiveness, the almost indecent jokes and tricks, the hysterical enhancing of emotions with which she was surrounded.

She felt it a relief when, the guests having retired for some sleep, she was free to perform her daily devotion at the shrine downstairs.

It was a quaint place, this shrine dedicated to Mai Kâli in her terrific form—in other words, to Our Lady of Pain—the Woman ever in travail of mind and body—the Ewig

Weiblichkeit which is never satisfied. It formed on the river side of the house, a sort of low basement, private in so far that a flight of steep stone steps led down to it from the lowest storey of the house, public in that it opened on to some bathing steps. But few people came thither except on certain festivals; so Parbutti, still in her wedding finery, stole down to it confidently. She liked the small, dim, arched chamber where you could only see Mai Kâli as a blotch of crimson in her dark niche. And as you crept down the stairs behind that niche, and looked through the criss-cross iron bars that filled up the arch, "She" showed nothing but a black shadow against the brilliance beyond. Parbutti used often to stand for an instant or two on the cornerwise landing of the stairs to look before passing up. Everything showed black but the low square of the outside doorway; and even the pigeons when they flew across it seemed flitting shadows on the light. To-day she was in a hurry, so she squatted down promptly at a respectful distance from the image, and began to smear the floor from a goglet of red paint she had brought with her. And as she did so she chanted:

"Om! Om! Kâli Ma!—
"Ruler, Thou, of blackest night—
"Dark, Dark, not a Star—
"In Thy Heaven Kâli Ma!—
"Thou who lovest the flesh of man—
"By this blood I pray thee ban—
"Aliens in Hindustan—
"Kill them, Kâli Ma!—
"Drink their blood and eat their flesh—
"Thou shalt have it fresh and fresh—
"Lo! devour it! lick thy lips—
"Flesh in lumps and blood in sips—
"Stain thyself with sacred red—
"Make them lifeless, dead! dead! dead!
"Blessed Kâli Ma!
"Ho-o-m! 'Phut!"

The last two words were spoken with relish, not only because they were supposed to be the most potent part of the charm, but because they lent themselves to dramatic effect. *Ho-om* being given soft and low; *phut* explosively. The result being suggestive of an angry tom-cat. But the rest of the doggerel came slackly, for Parbutti was not

much interested in it. It was not her curse at all, but one she had promised her schoolboy brother, Govinda, to say every evening. For many reasons; chiefly, it is to be feared, because someone else, at present nameless, was a class-fellow of the said Govinda's. But everyone knew, that if there was one compelling prayer on earth it was that of a maiden bride; even Mai Kâli could not resist it. And the petition was a fair one. Who wanted aliens in Hindustani? Not she! Why! their presence made your menkind do unspeakable things, so that life became wearisome with pacifying the gods. Imagine not being able to kiss . . .

Voices close at hand, made her leap to her feet, and gain the staircase like a frightened hare. Then, of course, being a girl, she paused to peep through the grating.

Surely it was Govinda! Then, she need not have run away! No! he had a tall lad with him! Parbutti's heart beat to suffocation. Was it possible? Could it be? Was it—well! what she had been taught to consider her prayer, her pilgrimage, her paradise; that is, her duty and her pleasure combined? Stay! there was another lad—short! And yet another—middle-sized!

This was disconcerting; but perhaps if she listened a little she might find out. So she stood still as a mouse, all ears, praying in her inmost heart it might be the tall one.

Though they spoke in Bengâli, they used such a plentitude of English words that it was difficult for her to understand fully what they said. It was not all their fault, as it arose largely from the fact that the ideas they wished to express, being purely Western, had no Eastern equivalents. Parbutti, however, had been accustomed to this sort of talk, as she had been a great favourite of her father's, and till the last year or so, had often sate on his knee as he entertained his friends.

So she listened patiently to pæans about Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, mingled with darkling threats—threats which must destroy all three by depriving some brother of the Liberty of Life or at best of an arm or a leg!

For they were only silly schoolboys, who, but for an alien ideal of education, would have been learning, as their

father had learnt, unquestioning, unqualified obedience at a Guru's feet. Learning it probably with tears, tied up in a sack with a revengeful tom-cat, or with a heavy brick poised on the back of the neck for livelong hours; such being the approved punishments for the faintest disobedience. Small wonder then, if the organism accustomed to this immemorial control, runs a bit wild when it finds itself absolutely free to do and think as it likes.

These particular boys were very angry, apparently, because some one of their number had been forced to obey something or someone. It was tyranny. The Mother-land and their religion was outraged. They were all Bengâli Brahmans; so Kâli worshippers by birth, and of the Sakta cult; possibly of the Left-handed or Secret form of that cult. Anyhow they talked big of Force being the one ruling principle by which men could rule, of the true Saktas' or Tantriks' contempt for public opinion, of their determination to show the world that the Tantras had been given by the gods in order to destroy the oppressors of men. So, *Jai* Anarchism! *Jai Kâli! Jai Bhairavi! Jai Banda Materam!*"

It was a sad farrago of nonsense; Western individualism dished up skilfully by professional agitators in a garb of Eastern mysticism; but they talked it complacently, while Parbutti, still as a mouse, told herself it must be the tall one; he had such a nice voice.

Her hopes gained confidence when he lingered behind with Govinda after the others departed, and began speaking in a lower voice. Could he be talking about her? Ever and always that came as the uppermost thought. Then consideration told her this was not possible; no respectable bridegroom could talk of his bride to another—not even if he also were a Kulin and a brother. What was it then, about which they were so mysterious when there was nobody nigh?—here a twinge of compunction shot through her—at least nobody they could know about.

At last, her ears becoming accustomed to the strain, she caught one sentence: "My father was Mai Kâli's priest here"; so by degrees gathered that there was some secret

receptacle somewhere, and that the tall youth wished to hide something.

The something appeared to be in what Parbutti had supposed to be a hooded cage such as students often carry about with their pet *avitovats* or fighting quails inside. But this one contained a square box, which the boy removed with great care, and then, before Parbutti had grasped what he was doing, he was round at the back of the carven image, kneeling with his back towards her, and fumbling at the gilt wooden drapery about Mai Kâli's waist; Govinda meanwhile keeping a look-out at the door.

How close he was! If she put out a hand she could touch him—she thrilled all over at the thought! Too close at any rate for her to move; besides, she must see what happened.

Ye gods! The drapery slid up! Mai Kâli was hollow!

"If aught happens to me," said the nice voice solemnly, "I leave this in thy charge, oh! Govinda Ram, Kulin. Thou art the only other living soul who knows of it. And see thou use it as it should be used. A cocoanut full for a bomb. It requires no fuse. The concussion is sufficient if the hand is bold."

The box deposited, the panel slid back again, and the tall lad rising from his knees stepped to the front again. As he did so, Parbutti caught a glimpse of his face. It was beautiful as the young Bala-Krishna, and the whole soul and body of her went out to him—her hand stole through the bars to touch the air in which he had stood—the happy air which had touched him.

So absorbed was she in her joy that she did not realise what was going on until the sound of their voices brought her back to reality. Then she recognised that they were repeating the vow of secrecy which is imposed on all initiates to the Tantrik cult. "I swear by the Eternal Relentless and Living Power I worship never to divulge the Secret, but to bury it deeply in silence and ever preserve it inviolate and inviolable. I will conceal it as the water in a cocoanut is concealed. I will be a Kaula internally, a Saiva externally, and a Vaishnava when talking at public meetings." Then they branched off into that of the new

secret political society which underlies the old religious mysteries. And Parbutti listened with growing fear, for this was sheer straightforward cursing of informers and lukewarm supporters and spies—and—and——

If they should go on to her? If he should curse her?

The long stillness had told on her nerves—she felt as if she must scream, must do something to prevent the dreadful sequence going on and on. . . .

"And cursed be they who listen and——"

The voices were checked by a passionate cry—

"Curse me not! Curse me not! I swear! I, Parbutti, swear to keep faith!"

Then, terrified at everything, even her own temerity, she turned and fled.

There was little leisure allowed her for thought in the women's apartment that night, for each one vied with the other in devising cantrips, most of them undescribable, to secure for her a truly uxorious husband; but one thing beat through her brain. Would he, could he—if it *were* he—be angry with her? Surely not! She had sworn, and she would keep her oath. Yes! she would keep it faithfully.

So the day dawned and another tumult of rejoicing rose around her.

In view of the delay in her betrothals it had been arranged to crowd in the ceremonials as closely as possible, so as to expedite the actual marriage, and everybody was running about, conches were blowing, women were giggling and laughing as the professional guests of the male sex cracked doubtful jests while they awaited the arrival of the bridegroom.

And then came a sudden hush. Something must have happened. What was it?

Parbutti, sitting apart swathed in her wedding scarlet, was too dazed to notice the pause at first, until low, and whimpering, an unmistakable woman's wail rose amid the garlands and tinsels, the paper flowers, the swinging lanterns.

She started to her feet—was someone dead?

In a way, the news that had come was worse than death. *That* was an act of God to be accepted with what resigna-

tion could be mustered. But this? What! They had arrested a bridegroom on his wedding day!—and Govinda, too, the son of the house! What! Those boys—they *could* not be guilty! It was only the tyranny of the hated police. They could not be mixed up with Anarchists. So said some of the men; but others held their peace and looked sinister, while all the women wept and wailed, and called on Mai Kâli to avenge the sacrilege. Only Parbutti sate very still, very silent. She knew something that the others did not know, but the knowledge only increased her blind resentment, only aggravated her blind despair.

He had been filched from her—if it *was* he. She was too dulled by disappointment at first to do more than realise her loss, and the thought of her oath of fealty did not come to her at all until after three months' needless delay in trying the conspiracy case against some forty students in the college—a delay due entirely to the hair-splitting efforts of the counsel for the defence—Govinda settled it for himself by dying in prison of autumnal fever. His had never been a good life; he had almost died of it the year before; he might have died of it at home. But the loss of a son, even when he is not the only one, is a grievous loss to a Hindu household, and it brought enhanced and almost insensate anger to every member of it; except to Parbutti, who went about her household duties calmly, almost stupidly.

Then came the final blow. The bridegroom—was it *he*?—she wondered dully—shot himself with a revolver smuggled in to him by a woman, a young and pretty woman full of patriotism and poetry, a woman brought up on Western lines, who was almost worshipped by the Nationalist party of unrest.

Parbutti heard the tale, still calm to outward appearance. She heard women's voices, full of curiosity, tell of the deed of patriotism, as it was called: she heard them wonder what the woman agitator was really like, and say that Kâli Ma would surely, ere long, rise up in Her Power and smite the M'llechas hip and thigh.

And then they looked at her and shook their heads. Neither maid, wife, nor widow, it would be more difficult

than ever to find fresh betrothals for her. Whereupon Ramabhai wept as she had wept before with sharp sobs and little outcries. And once more Parbutti said nothing, though she was quivering all over. It would be impossible to define her feelings, they were such an admixture of hatred, and love, of fear, and jealousy, and despair. And through it all came the question: "Was it he?"—while, as a background, sheer physical disappointment stretched every fibre of her mind and body almost to breaking joint.

So it went on until one day someone spoke to her almost as if she had been a widow, and bade her do something almost menial.

She did it without a word. It was noon time and the house was deserted; those who were in it being asleep. She sate for a while in the sunshine of the courtyard, her hands on her knees, doing nothing. Then suddenly she rose, and slipped into the room which Ramabhai used as a wardrobe.

When she emerged from it she was swathed in the scarlet and gold Benares *khim-kob* that had cost four hundred rupees, and her arms, her neck, her feet, were hung with golden ornaments.

They tinkled as she made her way down the steep stone stairs to Kâli's shrine. Dark, and still, and small, it lay, with a faint scent of incense about it; for the previous day had been a festival, and many folk had been to worship there.

But Kâli—Mai Kâli—would never have better worshipping than Parbutti meant to give her. How the idea had come to the girl's mind who can say; but dimly, out of her confused thoughts had grown the conviction that something must be done. She was the only one, now, who knew the secret; but it was useless in her hands. She could not go out and throw bombs, as he doubtless would have thrown them had he lived; so giving the Great Goddess the Blood for which she craved. Yes! he had meant to do it, for were not the aliens accursed? Had they not killed him?

She mixed everything up hopelessly; Mai Kâli and the Sacrament of Blood, her own loss and the public good; she felt angry, and weary, and disappointed; she felt that

she ought to do something, that she must get Someone stronger than she was on her side, to do what she was helpless to do.

So, confused, obstinate, she stepped behind the image, slid back the panel, and took out the box. Then, producing a cocoanut shell from the folds of her *sare*, she filled it carefully, methodically, and put back the box carefully, methodically.

This done, she went to the front of the image, smeared the floor once more with blood-red, and began her maiden's prayer—the prayer that is infallible!

"Om! Om! Kâli Ma!—
"Dark! Dark! Not a star—
"In my Heaven, Kâli Ma!—"

This time her voice was high and hard, for had not Mai Kâli to be compelled—yea! even by the greatest of sacrifices?

"Thou shalt have it fresh and fresh—
"Blood to drink, and lumps of flesh—"

Higher and higher grew the voice; it did not falter at all: not even when at the final

"*Hoom phut*"

the girl, raising her hand on high, dashed the cocoanut she held upon the ground boldly.

There was a faint flash, an instant explosion, a grinding noise as the house rocked to its foundation, then steadied into quiescence.

But Parbutti had kept her promise to Mai Kâli, and to—*him*; for the Goddess might have satisfied Her craving for Blood, Her desire for Flesh amid the welter of broken stones and twisted grids, of shattered wood-carving and torn Benares *khim-kob*, of jewels rent apart and splintered bones, that was all remaining of Her shrine, Her image, and Her worshipper.

Whether She will keep her part of the bargain is another matter.

But the Maiden's Prayer has been said, the Greatest of Sacrifices has been made.

SILVER SPEECH AND GOLDEN SILENCE

I

SILVER SPEECH

"It is not only the interest of India—now the most considerable part of the British Empire—but the credit and honour of the British nation itself, will be decided by this division. We are to decide by this judgment whether the crimes of individuals are to be turned into public guilt and national ignominy; or whether this nation will convert the very offences which have thrown a transient shade upon its government into something that will reflect a permanent lustre upon the honour, justice and humanity of the kingdom! My lords! There is yet another consideration equal to those other two great interests I have stated—those of our Empire, of our national character—something that, if possible, comes more home to the hearts and feelings of every Englishman—I mean the interests of our constitution itself, which is deeply involved in this case."

In the audience, a young man, fair of face, blue of eye, looked up suddenly, then muttered under his breath:

"Hard cheek! What the deuce has he got to do with the British constitution?"

"Do be quiet, Tom!" blushed the girl who sat next him in a whisper; "they'll hear you."

Tom relapsed into bored silence, and the stream of words went on—

"But the crimes we charge against him are not lapses, defects, errors of common human frailty which, as we know and feel, we can allow for. There are no crimes that have not arisen from passions which it is criminal to harbour, no offences that have not their root in avarice, rapacity, pride, insolence, ferocity, treachery, cruelty, malignity of temper; in short, in nothing that does not argue a total

extinction of all moral principle, that does not manifest an inveterate blackness of heart dyed ingrain with malice, vitiated, corrupted, gangrened to the very core."

"Confound his Billingsgate!" murmured Tom Gordon softly. "What good does it do—anybody?"

"H'sh!" came the warning feminine whisper; "his accent is really very good."

Tom shifted uneasily, and once again the strenuous, eager voice, struggling bravely against the harshness of the English language, was the only sound held in the white walls of the Mission School at Ilmpur, a little Punjab town set in a waste of sand. The hot sunshine slanted across it in broad, golden rays from the upper windows, to lay broad, yellow squares on the cool whitewash. Through the doors, set open to the air on all sides, the same hot, yellow sunshine slanted in on the upturned faces of the students, all bent—with elation in their looks—on the prize English speaker, who was declaiming his set speech out of Burke's famous impeachment of Warren Hastings. Declaiming it before, as the local paper put it, "Mr. Commissioner Gordon and his good lady, Mr. Tom Gordon, a fine young man worthy of his great father who has lately entered India from Eton in quest of police post, the beautiful Miss Gordon, and many others of European renown, including natives of high official positions, who have honoured the Reverends Freemantle and Smith with attendance at their mission-school prizegiving."

They sat in a semicircle on the dais. A quaint company. Mr. Commissioner Gordon, with a painstakingly pious expression on his grizzly red-bearded face, inwardly rehearsing the speech he would have to make in his turn; his good lady nervously eyeing the gilt books which she would have to give away, spread out on the table before her. It was covered with a royal red cloth, and on it stood a packed posy of jasmine blossoms and marigolds. The odour of the crushed blossoms mingled with the confused scent of cocoanut oil, roses, and curry powder which is inseparable from every Indian assembly. On one side of the Commissioner sat the Reverend Freemantle, a gentleman with a beard grown white in the service of

education. Mild, placid, benevolent, his face beamed out over his students. They were all doing well, and Gunpat-Rai was simply excelling himself by showing complete mastery over both vowels and consonants. Indeed, in the whole semicircle of eager teachers and approvers upon the platform there was not to be seen a dissentient expression; and one *zenana*-worker positively wept tears of joy, because it was through her dreary daily drudgery amongst fetid alleys and sunless back courts that the prize pupil had originally come to the mission-school.

Otherwise he might have remained as his father had remained all his life, proprietor of an odd little shop right away from all other shops, where they sold matches and oil, flour and earthenware dishes, string and pipe-bowls—everything, in fact, which might suddenly be wanted in the big, high, tenement houses that elbowed and shouldered the little dark lane.

"The law is the security of the people of England! It is the security of the people of India!"

Gunpat-Rai's voice, overtaxed, almost broke over the climax of Burke's rhodomontade, but the tumultuous, undisciplined applause which followed, covered the fact, and he sat down feeling dazed, confused. It was the first time he had ever spoken in public, and he had found that he had not been afraid. That, in itself, was disturbing—he had not felt afraid!

Meanwhile, Mr. Commissioner Gordon's loud voice was bombarding the wall with fitful explosions of words which reverberated amidst an echo of hesitating stutters.

"Gives me great pleasure, unalloyed pleasure to—er—er—er—to—to see Indian youth—er—er—er—taking their place with—with—er—er—er——" Here a glance at his son—who, after the manner of sons when their fathers are speaking, was burying his face in his hands—seemed to supply the lacking phrase—"with the youth of England."

"Good Heavens!" groaned Tom Gordon aside plaintively; "I say, Nell, how long do you think the Guv'nor will be on his legs, for I'll slope out, and have a smoke——"

"S-st, Tom!" reproved his sister severely. "You can't—and you've got to play in the cricket match, you know."

Tom groaned again, but less plaintively; and so the speechifying went on, the burden of all being the incalculable advantage of a good sound English education in every walk of life. Did they but choose, every student present—at any rate, students of the stamp of Gunpat-Rai—might "rise to higher things."

So, with a final and formal hand-shake to the lad who had so distinguished himself, the company trooped out into the sunshine and the mission-school lay empty. Only in the place where Gunpat-Rai had sat ere rising to speak, a a tiny packet wrapped in silver-leaf betrayed its presence by shining like a star. It was the talisman which his little fifteen-year-old wife had given him that morning ere he started, with tears and laughter, because it was only the first half-chewed, half-sucked piece of dough-cake his first-born had ever had. It had dropped from his nerveless hand when, in a dire funk, he had stood up in answer to the call of his name.

It did not, however, shine long, for an impudent sparrow soon discovered that it was but dough made silvern, and promptly carried it off.

Meanwhile the cricket match was in full swing, Tom Gordon captaining one side, and the Reverend Mr. Freemantle (who still cherished an old blue cap he had worn in his Oxford days) the other.

Youth, however, had to be allowed for, so the last-comer from Eton found himself, to his great delight, at the head of ten smaller boys—jolly little chaps with bright eyes and boundless obediences—while the big students, including Gunpat-Rai—who was cock at cricket as in English, ranged themselves under their master.

They won the toss, and Tom Gordon, as he suppled his hands with the ball, told himself the bowling must be good.

And good it was, especially in style. The tall young figure in white flannels, close clipped about the lean flanks with the light blue belt, reminded one of a flying Mercury as it poised in delivery. Every woman's eye was on it in admiration. As for the swift balls it sent, they were a revelation to these Indian boys, who had never seen real cricket. They crumpled up before them like agitated

spiders when they came off the wicket, and when they came on it, they looked helplessly at the umpire to see if they were really out. The Reverend Mr. Freemantle made a good stand, the memory of many a past day coming back to give half-forgotten skill to his bat, his sheer delight in his youthful adversary's prowess making him bold. Still the score stood ominously at one figure when Gunpat-Rai took his place. Tom Gordon hitched up his belt and looked.

"I should say leg before," he muttered, "but they're so thin, they hardly count."

And then he let drive.

Now, whether the ball chose to hit Gunpat-Rai's bat or Gunpat-Rai's bat chose to hit the ball, is immaterial. Away it went beyond the boundary, and Gunpat-Rai's long legs scored four. A sharp, hissing roar of delight rose from the assembled school, and Tom Gordon frowned faintly; but he was far too good-humoured to withstand what followed. Heartened up by his absolutely unlooked-for success, Gunpat-Rai who, though his legs were thin, was a powerful enough young fellow, did everything and more than everything that could be expected of him. He gambolled out and slogged wildly, he pirouetted like a teetotum and nearly killed his wicket-keep, and finally let drive at his partner's wicket, demolishing all three stumps.

"Out!" cried the umpire ruefully, but with commendable impartiality, and when Tom Gordon had sufficiently recovered from his laughter to assert that no one but the stumps had suffered, another hissing roar of applause rose from the school.

All things, however, must come to an end, and a skying block of Gunpat-Rai's was finally caught by Tom Gordon as it appeared to be descending on his mother's lap. But the score stood at thirty-six, and as the batsman walked past him proudly yet sheepishly, the Eton boy shook him by the hand.

"By George, you know," he said, "you'd be another Ranji, with practice! I never saw such an innings played—never!"

Gunpat-Rai flushed up under his dark skin and gave back the grip with all the curious, lissome strength of an

Indian hand, in which the sinews seem made of iron, the bones of velvet.

After that it seemed of little count that Tom Gordon, who began the next innings, should, by a judicious foresight and the obedience of his small boys combined, carry out his last bat as last man with a score of seventy-two.

"You are too good for us, Gordon," laughed the Rev. Mr. Freemantle. "We must deport him from the station, or request him not to play again, mustn't we, boys?"

But the hissing roar which followed was of dissent, not assent, and when it had died away, Gunpat-Rai, as head of the school, spoke up, to his own surprise again, fluently.

"Cricket," he said, "is a noble game. We learn everything noble from England. So are we pleased to acquire proficiency at the hands of Mr. Tom Gordon, Esquire."

The soft dark eyes looked almost appealingly at the blue ones.

"All right," said their owner, curtly. "I'll come down and coach you a bit, if you like."

And he did.

II

GOLDEN SILENCE

"Why on earth can't you learn to hold your tongue, Gunpat?" said Tom Gordon roughly. "I thought you had more sense than to mix yourself up with those Arya Somajh agitators. You'll be getting yourself into trouble some day!"

The years had passed since the famous innings, making of the bowler an Assistant District Superintendent of Police, of the batsman a pleader in the High Court. Practically the balance of progress was all in favour of the latter. Coming from the house of a miserable merchant whose monthly earnings barely touched a living wage of the poorest description, he had risen far beyond his birthright, whereas Tom Gordon, on his pay of two hundred a month,

with poor promotion before him, had, if anything, fallen from his. But discontent sat in the dark eyes and cheerful acquiescence in the blue ones. Perhaps the owner of the latter was a better appraiser of his own worth, for he knew he was not clever; knew that though he was "jolly good" at this, he was not "jolly good" at that. Not so Gunpat-Rai. Clever at school—the cleverness of imitation, of memory—and gifted with a fluency of words beyond even that of most of his class, he had spent the first years of his young manhood in waiting for an appointment which never came. How could it come when every school in India turns out dozens of applicants as capable as he for every Government post from Cape Comorin to Holy Himalaya? Yet resentment at this failure of the impossible ate into his soul. So he had turned pleader, had drifted into the editing of a native newspaper, a copy of which lay on Tom Gordon's office table as he looked with kindly contempt at the man who sat opposite him. For, though Gunpat-Rai had not turned out a second Ranji, the memory of the old days when he had coached the Ilmpur school still lingered with the Eton boy, and he had shaken hands as frankly as ever when Gunpat-Rai had called to welcome him to his new district.

"I'll tell you what it is, Gunpat," continued Tom Gordon, "you fellows don't know what anybody wants but yourselves. Now, take this district—it's a very fair sample." He turned over the leaves of the last Census report which lay on his table rapidly. "Hum-m-m, here we are, Jahilabad, population 560,000 odd—240,000 Jat cultivators of the soil, 35,000 Banyas, presumably moneylenders—literacy—let's take the average for all India if you like—it tells enormously against my argument, but it can stand it! Now think! At fifty-three per thousand we have twenty-nine—let's say 30,000 men who can scrawl their names and spell out a line or two in their own vernacular. How many of these are put out of court by the 35,000 moneylenders? More than half, I'll wager. There you are, you educated men, a negligible minority, taking India as a whole. So why don't you speak for yourselves, not for the country at large? Because you don't

really mean anything, you don't know what you want yourselves." Tom Gordon paused in this unusual eloquence, and, with a laugh, turned to the handsome little fellow of six whom Gunpat-Rai had shown off with pride as his eldest son.

"Jolly little chap," said the Assistant Superintendent irrelevantly. "I suppose he's married?"

Gunpat-Rai flushed up under his dark skin as he had done five years before at the cricket match.

"The women——" he began.

"Oh, I know!" interrupted the young Englishman. "'*Stri acchar*,' and all that. But, I say, Gunpat! How the deuce are you going to govern India if you can't even settle your womenkind? No, my dear fellow! I haven't the faintest sympathy with you. You sail pretty near sedition in this copy." Here he laid his hand on the blurred, blotched broadsheet which called itself *The Star of Hope*. "But, by George! if you jib it the least bit more, I shall have to run you in. So don't be a fool. You're a good sort, Gunpat, and I shall never forget that innings of yours—never! If you would only have stuck to it instead of 'seeking a post in white clothing' you might have been——"

He paused, unable to say what; and Gunpat-Rai, feeling a like inability, the conversation ended uncomfortably.

And so it came to pass that not many more days afterwards, Tom Gordon sat once more in that curious atmosphere of cocoanut-oil and curry powder which is inseparable from Indian crowds, listening to Gunpat-Rai's voice. But he sat disguised in one of the front benches of the crowded hall, so that he had to look far back more than once to see that his constables were all in evidence. For a notable agitator on tour had stopped at the little town; and this was a meeting which must be reported upon, since here was no audience composed of peacefully seditious Bengali clerks and irresponsible students, but of stalwart Jats, discontented over some new, but as yet untried, scheme of irrigation. Now, irrigation stands closer to the heart of a Jat that does wife and children. What! was the Sirkar to deny the land its drink?

The other speakers had been innocuous. Their very vehemence had passed by the slumbering passions of the long-bearded Jats who listened to them with ill-concealed yawns. But with Gunpat-Rai it was different. At the first word Tom Gordon felt that he was in the presence of a born orator. And yet—and yet—surely the words were vaguely familiar in their import, if not in their sound?

"The crimes we charge against this alien Government of India," came the liquid Indian voice, "are not lapses, defects, errors of common frailty which we, brethren, as we know them in ourselves, can allow for. They are no crimes that have not arisen from evil passions—passions which it is criminal to harbour"—an iron mailed stick held by a burly farmer fell with a clang as its owner shifted it to his right hand—"no offences that have not their root in avarice, rapacity, pride, insolence, ferocity, treachery, cruelty, malignity of temper——" Each epithet seemed punctuated by a growing stir amongst the audience. "In short, in nothing that does not argue a total extinction of all moral principle, that does not manifest an inveterate blackness of heart."

Tom Gordon had it now! The Billingsgate he had confounded years ago, of course—Burke's Billingsgate!

He had flung off his disguise and leapt to the dais in a second.

"Oh, hold your jaw! Do, there's a decent chap! Don't go spouting other folks' abuse!" he cried.

But Gunpat-Rai was helpless before the sudden need for decision. "Dyed ingrain with malice, vitiated——" he went on mechanically.

The young Assistant Superintendent of Police gave a sharp glance behind him. What he saw there was not reassuring. "Oh! do shut up! Tell them the meeting's over, or there'll be mischief."

"Corrupted, gangrened——"

"Constables," came the order keenly, "clear the room! For Heaven's sake, Gunpat, don't get yourself into trouble!"

They were the last words Tom Gordon spoke. His hand slipped from Gunpat-Rai's shoulder as he was struck full

on the bare head from behind by an iron-bound staff which crashed into his skull.

Even then the tyranny of words held Gunpat-Rai, though the suddenness of the shock dislocated his sequence.

"Dyed ingrain, corrupted to the very core."

Then he stood staring at what lay before him, and a great silence—a golden silence from words—came to him at last.

He only broke it once, when he was on trial. The court was full of his friends, and on the dais sat Englishmen, so the conditions were nearly the same as they had been years ago when the hot sunshine had slanted from the upper windows at Ilmpur to lay broad squares on the cool white-wash.

"I learnt it at school," he said dully; and then he began: "But the crimes we charge against you——"

"Hush-h!" said the judge gravely. "We know what you learnt at school."

But that did not lessen the sentence.

THE FOOTSTEPS OF A DOG

She passed, smiling softly, though a vague trouble seemed to clutch at her heart. She had found him asleep so often of late, and if the driver slept, the oxen might well pause in their task of drawing water, and so the fields which needed it so much be deprived for yet another day of their life-giving draught. They were not, however, pausing now, at any rate. Their slow circling brought her sleeping husband to Sarsuti's eyes, and carried him away again, wheeling round by the well from whose depths a stream of water splashed drowsily into a wooden trough and then hurried away—a little ribbed ribbon of light—out of the shade of the great banyan tree into the sun-saturated soil beyond where the young millet was sprouting.

How cool it was, after her hot walk from the village! No wonder he slept! She sat herself down beside the runnel of water where a jasmine bush threw wild whips of leaf and blossom over the damp earth. There was no need to wake him yet. The bullocks would not pause now that she was there to make them do their work.

That was her task in life!—to make them do their work.

She sighed, and yet she smiled again, as the slow-circling oxen brought her husband Prema almost to her feet once more. How handsome he was, his bare head lying on the turban he had pressed into the service of a pillow. And his slender limbs! How ingeniously he had curved them on the forked seat so as to gain a comfortable resting-place! Trust Prema to make himself and everyone else in the world comfortable! A sudden leap of her heart sent the blood to dye her dark face still darker, as she thought of the softness, the warmth, the colour he had brought into her life.

How long had they been married? Ten years—a whole ten years, and there was never a child yet. It was getting

time. No! No! Not yet—not yet! She need not look that in the face yet.

She rose suddenly as the wheeling oxen brought him to her once more, and staying them with one swift word, bent over the sleeping man.

"Prem!" she said. "Prema! I am here." His arms were round her in an instant, his lips on hers; for here, out in the shadow amongst the sunshine, they were alone.

"Sarsuti! Wife!" he murmured drowsily, then with a laugh, shook his long length and stood beside her, his arm still about her waist. Tall as he was, she was almost as tall, a straight, upstanding Jatni woman with eyebrows like a broad bar across her face.

But, as her dark eyes met his in passionate adoration, something in the sight of his exceeding beauty smote her to the heart. The thought that there was none to inherit it, the knowledge that if it passed it would leave nothing behind it. It is a thought which has driven many an Indian woman to take another woman by the hand and lead her home to be a hand-maiden to the lord. It drove Sarsuti—after long weeks, nay, months of thought—almost to speech.

"Prem!" she faltered, hiding her face on his breast, "I have been thinking—thou needst a son—and——" But she could get no further, partly because the words seemed to choke her, partly because Prema, turning her face to his with his soft, supple hand, stopped her mouth with kisses.

What was the use? What was the use, she asked herself fiercely, thinking of such things when she loved him so? Some morning, aye! some summer morning after a summer's night, she would rather make the Dream-compeller send her to sleep, once and for all!—to sleep and dreams of Prema and his love! Then he could marry again, and there would be children to light up the old house, a son to light the funeral pyre.

But now—no! Not yet! . . .

The sunshine filtering through the broad leaves dappled them with light and shade; the oxen resting stood head down, nosing at the damp earth; the water, ceasing to splash, ran silently more and more slowly on its way, and

all around them a yellow glare of heat hemmed them in breathlessly. Yet here, at the well, the jasmine grew green, a big datura lily, rejoicing in the shade, threw out its wide white blossoms, and, looking down to the mirror-like pool of water into which the long, unending circle of deftly-arranged earthen pots and ropes dipped, you could see the tufts of maidenhair fern which came God knows whence. They were like love in the heart—Heaven-sent!

"Thou wilt call at the Lala-*jee's* this evening, Sarsuti," said Prema, with a faint note of half-shamed uneasiness in his voice, as, his midday meal of milk and hearth-cakes over, she prepared to go back. "He deals more justly with thee than with me—may he be accursed, and may the footsteps of a dog . . ."

"S'st! Prema," she interrupted, "the Lala-*jee* is no worse than his kind; and we have asked so much—lately."

Yes! she thought as she trudged homewards, they had asked much, for Prema had a lavish hand. Yet she would, of course, have him keep up his position as head man of the village; the position that had been hers by right as the only child of her father. Prema, her cousin, had gained it through his marriage to her, by special favour of the Sirkar, in memory of good service done in the Mutiny time by the old man. He had been a better husbandman than Prema, and money had gone fast these few years since he died, though she had tried to keep things as they had been. Still, who could grudge Prema the handsomest yoke of oxen in the country-side, the fleetest mare? And those mad experiments of his with new ploughs, new seeds that the Huzoors spoke about! It was well to keep to the soft side of the masters, no doubt, yet it should be done discreetly—and when was Prema ever discreet? She almost laughed, even while she stooped to let the water from an over-flooded plot run into the next by removing the clod which her husband had forgotten, thinking of his indiscreetness—of the gifts he showered on her when he had money in his pocket to pay for them; sometimes when he had not. Of course, the Lala-*jee* would listen to reason and lend more on the coming crop—who could deny Prem anything?

But the Lala was curiously obdurate. He was an old

man, who had backed the luck of the village for three generations, and never had a dispute with his creditors.

"See you, daughter," he said. "Prem for all he is head man and thy husband, is but man, and there is none to come after him."

Her face darkened with a hot blush again.

"The land will be there," she replied, haughtily.

"Aye, but who will own it? Strangers, they say, from far away. I have no dealings with strangers."

"There will be my share," she protested.

"Aye! but how wilt thou fare with strangers also, thou—childless widow?" he asked.

Her hot anger flamed up. "Wait thou and see! Meanwhile, since thou art afraid, take this," she tore off the solid gold bangle she wore, "'tis worth fifty rupees at the veriest pawnshop—give me forty!"

"Nay," replied the bunnya, with spirit. "'Tis worth a good seventy-five, though thy man—I'll warrant me—paid a hundred. So seventy-five thou shalt have; but, look you, daughter—or, if thou willest it, mother—keep Prem in leash, or a surety the footsteps of a dog will show on his ashes."

She looked at him, startled. Curious how the phrase, born of a belief that one can read the reward of the dead from the marks which show on his funeral pyre, should crop up. First from Prem, regarding the Lala-*jee*, next from the Lala-*jee* concerning Prem. Was there any truth in it, she wondered? She had the money, that was one comfort, and Prema would be pleased. Then, when the Biluch mare foaled, and they sold it as a yearling for the three hundred rupees Prem thought it would fetch, she would tell him how she had pawned his gift; meanwhile, a brass bracelet, to be had at the shop for a rupee, would serve to deceive his eyes. But not the sharp ones of Veru, the young widow who was the only other inhabitant of the wide courtyard with its slips of arcaded rooms round about it, and great stacks of millet stalks, and huge bee-hive stores of grain.

Her eyes were on it from the moment Sarsuti, sitting down above her on the little raised mud dais, began to spin.

"Thou needst not stare so, girl," broke in Sarsuti, at

last. "Yes! I have pawned it. He needed money, and he is more to me than aught else beside—more than thou, husbandless, can dream, child."

Veru—she was indeed but little more than a child, this virgin widow of Sarsuti's half-brother, who had been born and died in his father's old age—held her head lower over her wheel, and said nothing. Her widow's shroud seemed to swallow her up. Yet in that Jat household she was kindly enough treated, for Sarsuti's strong arms loved work, and she had a great pity in her great soft heart for all unloved things. Here was no question of shaven head or daily fasting. Veru simply led a cloistered life, and did what share her strength allowed of the daily work. Of late that had not been much; she had complained of fatigue, and had sat all day spinning feverishly as if to make up for her failure in other ways; for she was a sensitive little thing, ready to cry at a word of blame.

So the evening passed by. Prema was not to be back from the well till late, not, indeed, until the moon set; for the young millet had been neglected somewhat, and even he was roused to the necessity for action. Water it must have, or there would be no crop. Thus, as the sun set, Sarsuti cooked the supper, reserving the best dough cakes, the choicest morsels of the pickled carrots against her husband's return, and then, being weary, lay down so as to freshen herself up to receive him as he should be received. The night was hot, there was a restlessness in it which found its way into her mind, and she lay awake for some time thinking of what the Lala-*jee* had said. Yes! It was time, it was growing time for so many things. Yes! she must harden her heart and be wise—the footsteps of the . . .

Here she fell asleep.

When she woke, there was pitch darkness. The moon had set. What had happened? Had Prema returned, and, full of kindliness as ever, seen she was tired and so refrained from waking her? She put out her hand and touched his bed, but he was not there. How late he was! And where was Veru? Veru, who should have been watching for him.

"Veru! lazy child—art asleep?"

Her question came back to her unanswered; Veru, also, was not in the wide courtyard. Where were they?

The very conjunction of her thought regarding them, woke in her a sudden swift pang of jealousy.

Where were they?

A minute later, holding an oil cresset in her hand as a guard against snakes, she was passing swiftly through the deserted village on her way to the well. Prema might have fallen asleep—he might be asleep still. The night was so dark, she held the lamp high above her head so as to throw its light before her on the narrow edge of a pathway between the flooded fields. It was so still, she could hear the faint sob made by some deadly thing slipping from her coming into the water, over which a wandering firefly would flash, revealing an inky glimmer between the rising shoots of corn. Ahead, that massed shadow was the banyan tree. The fireflies were thick there, thick as cressets at a bridal feast . . .

If Prema slept—Yes! if he slept, to be awakened by a kiss.

Underneath the arching branches of the banyan tree it was dark indeed, but the silence of it told her that the oxen anyhow were at rest.

And Prema!

As she held the light forward, something on the ground at her feet caught her eye—jasmine! Jasmine twined into a wreath. For whose head? Not hers!

"Prema!" she called. "Prem!"

There was no answer. But he was there for all that; half resting on the forked seat, as if he had flung himself upon it when weary; weary and content; his head thrown back upon his arm, his whole body lax with sleep—and with content.

She had seen him look thus so often! "Prem!" she whispered. "Prem!" and touched him on the bosom.

Then a hideous shriek of terror and horror startled the sleeping oxen into forward movement, as from the folds of his clothes, like some evil thought, there slipped a snake, swift, curved, disappearing into the darkness.

"Prem! Prem! Speak to me! Oh, Prem—speak!"

As she flung herself upon him, the forward movement of the oxen forced her to her knees, so heeding it not at all, one hand holding the light close to his face as she strove vainly to rouse him, she was dragged along the accustomed round, until the beasts, recognising the unaccustomed strain, paused once more.

"Prem! Say thou art not dead—say only that, Prem!" she moaned.

Her voice seemed to reach him on the far edge of the great Blank, for his eyelids quivered. Then, for one moment, he looked at her, and there was appeal in his eyes.

"Wife—Veru—my——" It was scarcely a whisper, but she heard it, and with a cry of joy, she caught him in her strong arms, laid him on the ground, and, tearing his cloth aside, sought for the wound. Finding it, her lips were on it in a second. Ah! could kisses draw the poison, surely her frantic love must avail.

But no. His eyelids closed. There was no sound, only a little quiver that she felt through her lips. Then his beauty lay still beneath them.

After a time she drew herself away from him, and laid his head upon her lap. So she sat, dazed, thinking of that jasmine wreath in the dust, and of that half-heard whisper—

"Wife—Veru—my——" My—what?

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"And there is none to come after him," said the village worthies, when the fire of Prema's burning had died down to smouldering embers, and the oldest man of his clan in the village had performed the rites which should have been the duty of a son.

And then they shook their heads wisely, thinking that men of Prem Singh's kind ran an ill risk in the next world without a son to perform the funeral obsequies; especially, nowadays, when the law prevented a dutiful wife from ensuring her husband's safety and salvation by burning herself on his funeral pyre. Yea! it was an ill world indeed in which the fostered virtue of a woman you had cared for

and cossetted might not avail to save the man she loved from the pains of purgatory. And then they drifted away, full of surmise and deep desire concerning the headship of the village. Mai Sarsuti could not hold it as a widow, though she could hold the land; and there were no relations —none. So the coast was clear for many claims.

Sarsuti meanwhile had not clamoured—as many an Indian widow does even nowadays—to be allowed to sacrifice herself for her husband's salvation. She had scarcely wept. She had, on the contrary, spoken sternly to Veru, bidding her keep her foolish tears until all things had been done in due order to keep away the evil spirits and ensure peace to the departed.

Then, after all the ceremonies were completed, and Prem's beauty lay swathed awaiting sunset for its burning, she had sat on one side of his low bier, while Veru sat on the other, and the wail had risen piercingly—

"Naked he came, naked he has gone; this empty dwelling-house belongs neither to you nor to me."

There had been a menace in her voice, high-pitched, clear, almost impassive, while Veru's had been broken by sobs.

So now that frail weakling was asleep, wearied out by her woe, while Sarsuti sat where the bier had been, still in all the glory of her wifely raiment, still with the vermilion stain upon her forehead, still wearing round her neck the blessed marriage cord with which he had so often toyed. For she had point-blank refused to allow it to be broken. Time enough for the widow's shroud, she had said. To-day she was still Prem's wife—he had scarce had time to die.

So she sat quite still, looking at the place where he had lain, thinking of those last words. Had she really heard them? Was it possible, the thing that had leapt to her mind?

Deep down in her heart she knew vaguely that the feet of her idol had been of clay; that with Prem all things were possible. Poor, wandering feet, which might yet have kept to the straight path, if—Oh, Prem! Prem! Had it been her fault? Or was she wronging him?

Then, suddenly, that recurring phrase recurred to her once more.

"The footstep of a dog—the footstep of a dog."

Was it past midnight? Had another day begun—the day of judgment? Surely; then she could see—yea! She could prove it was not true.

The moon was just sinking as, close-wrapped in her veil, she crept down to the edge of the nullah, where the burning-ground lay; a gruesome place, haunted by the spirits of the departed, not to be ventured near after dark. But Sarsuti had forgotten all the village lore, she had forgotten everything save that deadly doubt.

Yonder, it must be on the point close to the water, for still an almost mist-like vapour lingered there. She sped past the faintly lighted patches on the hard-baked soil which told of other burnings, murmuring a prayer for the peace of dead souls, and so found herself beside that little pile of dear ashes. A breeze from the coming dawn stirred them, sending a grey flake or two to meet her.

"Prem!" she whispered; then, as she stooped to look, the whisper passed to a cry—

"Oh! Prema! Prema!"

She lay there face down, her hands grovelling in the still warm embers on which there showed unmistakably the footstep of a dog!

And the moon sank, so there was darkness for a while. Then in the far east the horizon lightened, bringing a grey mystery to the wide expanse of the level world. And behind the greyness came a primrose dawn, and the sun, rising serene and bright, sent a shaft of light to touch her as she lay.

Then she rose, and dusting the dear ashes from her almost blistered hands, she crept back to the wide court-yard, where Veru still slept, worn out by sorrow. She stood watching her asleep, wondering at her own blindness. Then she touched her on the bosom.

"Wake!" she cried, in a loud voice. "Wake! Oh, Veru! And speak the truth!"

The girl started up, and the eyes of the two women met.

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The village was bitterly disappointed; but, of course, there was nothing to be done but wait and see if the child was a son, for Mai Sarsuti had stolen a march on them. She had gone staight to the burra-sahib, straight to the head district official, and told him of her hopes. What is more, she had petitioned for trustees to work the land, seeing that she and her sister-in-law were poor widows; and she, especially, unfit for work.

So three of the village elders had been convened to see to the land and render account to the sahib, who would be sure to keep an eye on them seeing that Mai Sarsuti was an upstanding, straightforward Jatni, just the kind to whom the sahib-logue gave consideration. And, after all, she and hers deserved it, for they came of a long line of virtuous, loyal people.

So Sarsuti, with Veru, lived in the seclusion which befitted her recent loss; though, according to custom, she still wore a wife's dress. But she grew haggard as the months went by. Small wonder, said the village matrons, when they returned from their occasional visits, seeing that she awaited a fatherless child.

Then one morning, Veru, looking very worn and frightened, and ill, came to tell the elders that a son had been born to Sarsuti. Perhaps it was as well, they thought, since otherwise there might be disputes about the headship. Now there could be none; and as there would be a very long minority under the care of the sahibs, Prem's son would come in to free land, and money laid up in the bank. A rich headman was always a prop to the village. So their wives went to congratulate the new-made mother.

She was looking haggard still, and scarcely seemed to rejoice in her great gift; but that, perhaps, might come by and bye.

But it did not. Sometimes she would take the baby and look at it long and earnestly. Then she would give it back to Veru, whose arms were seldom empty of Prem's child, and return to the work of the house, or sit watching them gravely from her spinning-wheel, her large dark eyes full of wistful pain.

So the months sped by.

And still Sarsuti wore a wife's dress and smeared vermilion on her forehead; and the mangala sutram, still unbroken, held the wife's medal round her throat. It would be time, she answered proudly to the shocked village women, to think of breaking it when Prem should have been dead a year, and the child be able to suck cow's milk.

She prepared for the anniversary by purchasing a Maw's feeding bottle, and an eagerness grew to her face as she watched little Prem take it, and roll over contentedly to sleep, like the fat good-natured little lump of a healthy child as he was. But Veru wept.

Still, Maw had supplanted Motherhood when the night came round again on which Sarsuti had heard that faint whisper from her dying husband. The child slept as a child should, and Veru, once more worn out by tears, slept also.

But, as on that night a year ago, Sarsuti sat on the place where Prem's bier had lain and thought, her dark eyes full of a great resolve. Suddenly she rose, tall, straight, upstanding, and passed to where the child lay. She stooped and kissed it—kissed it for the first time—then, throwing her arms skywards, murmured to High Heaven, "Lo! I have saved him—I, his wife"; and so, catching up a small bundle which she had prepared, passed into the darkness of the night.

* * * * *

They found her charred body at dawn, face downwards, where the footsteps of a dog had shown upon Prem's ashes.

She had saturated her clothes with paraffin, and set fire to herself deliberately.

"Lo! how she loved him," said the village elders, behind their outward and decorous disapproval. "See you, she is decked as a bride with all her jewels. Now, with a son in his house, and suttee on his pyre, there is no fear but what Prem hath found freedom."

"Ay!" assented the Lala-*jee*. "The footstep of a dog will not be seen on his ashes."

THE FINDING OF PRIVATE FLANIGAN

We were quartered up in the hills making a military road when Private Flanigan was lost. It was to be a big road, cutting clean into the heart of the Himalayas, so various detachments were set to work upon its long length. Ours was the last but one, and we were lucky in getting by far the best pitch on the whole line. It would be difficult, indeed, to exaggerate its beauty, and as summer came on the advantages of shade-shelter which it afforded made us feel blessed above our fellows. It was a green oasis about half-a-mile long by some quarter broad, of fine emerald sward not to be beaten by any English lawn. And it was irregularly fringed by the most magnificent deodar cedars I have ever seen. When we arrived in early autumn these were wreathed with virginia creeper already russet, which, as winter advanced, flamed like fire among the dark spines. Now, in spring the trees were hung to their very tops with a rambling white rose, faintly double, faintly yet penetratingly scented, which festooned the whole forest, making it look as if it were garlanded for some festival, and turning the oval greensward into a veritable *stadium* fit for the sport of a King; for an amphitheatre of blue hills rose behind the forest, with here and there a peak of eternal snow.

It was simply a ripping place, and when on Saturday evenings, the detachment further south, and the detachment further north, used to come over to play football, the fellows were always full of envy. Our men—there were but two officers with each detachment—were little Ghurkas, but they played an uncommonly good game, thanks partly to the fact that my captain was an old Rugby man, and gave his countenance to practice. But our chief asset was Private Flanigan of the small party of Sappers and Miners who acted as overseers on the works. He was not, perhaps,

a shining example to the men in other ways, but so far as football went, he was the best possible coach.

The result was, that, despite their small size, our Ghurkas could hold their own with the detachment of Tommies further south. They never actually won a match, but they made a stubborn fight, and accepted honourable defeat good humouredly, treating their adversaries right royally at the canteen afterwards in the manner of Ghurkas when they get chummy with British regiments. It was a quaint sight to see them hob-nobbing together at the further end of the *stadium*, where there was a duck-pond sort of lake half filled with sacred lotus, blossoming white and pink. A wood-slab little temple dedicated to Kâli stood beside this lake with steps leading down to the water; but nobody seemed to notice its presence, and the very brahman in charge used to come and watch the games with interest; perhaps he thought it sufficiently savage to please the terrific goddess who sat enshrined in a little dark hole, where nothing was to be seen of Her but crimson arms and hands, one of them apparently holding a football. It certainly was bloodthirsty enough one day when the detachment further north came down to try their luck. They were the biggest, tallest, lankiest lot of Sikhs I ever saw, but, perhaps because they had such long shins, they simply knuckled under before a rush of our little beggars. It was almost pitiable to see them; the more so because they were furious, and would not accept consolation, even at the hands of Private Flanigan, who with unblushing kindness of heart, took all the credit to himself in the curious dialect he used as a means of communication with his pupils; for being a Manchester Irishman, his English had to contend with a town accent, a Lancashire accent and an Irish accent, while his Hindustani was of the lowest type to be picked up in a barrack square.

"'Taint your *kussoor* (fault), sonnies, at all, at all! be jabers! *nahin* (no). Don'tcher fret. *Dil khoosh* (heart happy). Kape yer 'air on. *Dekko you soors*—beg pardon, gintlemen, it was a mistake entoirely!—You 'aven't a *Nadmi* (man) like Tim Flanigan to *purwarish karo* (nourish) *you*." So in his garbled language he went on to boast of

what he had done for the little Gherkins, as he was wont to call them, making them, indeed, rhyme to jerkins and firkins in a football song he had composed; for Private Flanigan was great at singing, also at clog dancing. In fact, he was good at anything and everything he chose to take in hand thoroughly; but that was not much, for a more idle, able, devil-may-care fellow did not exist. He was, however, a general favourite, and I noticed that even my regulationarily correct captain dealt leniently with his not infrequent lapses from good behaviour. Flanigan was in tremendous form at a sing-song held the night of the football match, and literally brought down the house with his clog accompaniment to a patter song in which he parodied the feelings of victor and vanquished. Even the priest of Kâli, who, as usual, viewed the performance from a distance, was reported to have observed that the energetic and active Goddess herself could not have danced with greater vigour upon the prostrate body of Shiv-*jee*!

As for the Sikhs, they positively bellowed with delight, although Private Flanigan had not paltered with such obvious rhymes as kicks and licks. In fact, the whole audience was so happy and hilarious that we hoped the slight difference of the afternoon was forgotten; but we were mistaken. About midnight Sunt Singh, havildar, began to attribute Jye Kush *naick's* flat nose to a provision of the All-wise Creator in view of football squashes, and assert magniloquently that God never made an ugly Sikh, whereat strife arose, and *kukries* and *bichwas* might have drawn blood had not my captain shown discreet firmness, and sent an exactly equal number of Sikhs and Gurkhas to the guard room.

It was very shortly after this incident that Private Flanigan found himself there also; as usual for patronising the canteen too liberally. But this time he was profusely indignant, and assured me on his Bible oath—as a rule he professed Roman Catholicism—that it was a gross case of mistaken diagnosis. He had not been drunk; still less, disorderly. When the sergeant put him under arrest he was merely giving a realistic and spirited representation of last year's All England match *as it had appeared to him.*

And this he was doing solely for the benefit of his pupils, the little Gherkins; shirkin', lurkin' little Gherkins, who had basely failed to speak up for him when he was comatose from fatigue.

That was about the last time I ever spoke to poor Flanigan; for about a week after he was mysteriously lost. I say mysteriously, because though all sorts of theories were put forward to explain his disappearance, none of them were entirely satisfactory. I myself, inclined to the explanation that, being, according to the Ghurkas' testimony, a little bit on at the time, he lost his life in a sudden spate of the river caused by the melting of the snows in the higher hills. It was a very sudden spate, and caught the working party as they were clearing the southern end of a deep cutting—a tunnel, indeed, for twenty yards or so—which lay just at the end of our section. The Sikhs, however, who were working at the northern end, escaped the flood altogether, and rather jeered at our men who had to scramble for dear life, some regaining the camp and others spending the night in the open; so, each party thinking Flanigan must be with the other, he was not missed till next morning, when it was too late to find his body.

We dragged the river pools to no purpose, then, as the spate had ruined half our work, gave up the search and duly reported his death at headquarters.

With the prospect of the advancing hot weather before us, when we must knock off, there was not much time for amusement, and we were kept pretty close at it. But a Himalaya spring in the uplands was a perpetual temptation to me, and I used to start off at dawn time for a long tramp on the higher *murgs* or alps, taking my gun with me in case I came across an old cock *minawul* pheasant. There was a perfect mosaic of flowers beneath one's feet; forget-me-nots, pansies, white anemones, yellow gillyflowers, scarlet potentilla and half-a-hundred others whose names I did not know. You could not set your foot down without crushing some beautiful thing; you felt that you were ramping through a veritable garden.

Then it was marvellous to see the snow peaks flush red with sunrise while the shadow of night—the shadow of the

earth itself!—still lay immovable in the valleys, and you had to bend close over the mosaic to distinguish one flower from another. Even the cock *minawul*, despite their dazzling metallic lustre, looked shadowy and dark as they rose; rose swiftly to flash out suddenly into copper and green, and silvery goldeny blue as they met the higher sunlight.

One morning, thinking I had hit a splendid specimen of these rocketting fireworks, and being anxious to secure such a perfectly plumaged bird, I followed one over keenly. The result being that I lost my way, and found myself under a blazing hot sun, still seeking for my particular valley. At long last I caught a glimpse of deodar trees below me and began to descend confidently; but half way down a certain strangeness of contour made me pull up and question my judgment.

No! it was not our valley. It was too narrow, too small; besides, there was no lakelet in it. Indeed, there seemed no way out of it; it lay like an extinct crater, absolutely shut in by the high hills, tucked away—right away—No! by Jove! there were people or things in it. I could see a steady white spot of something on the greensward, and a sort of dancing circle of black specks.

Were they men or animals? I was too short-sighted to distinguish; so I started downwards again, impelled by curiosity and a vague feeling that I knew what was coming, to find a point of vantage whence I could see clearly.

I don't think I was in the least surprised at what I *did* see. I am sure my inner consciousness was aware of it before *I* was.

The dazzling white speck was Private Flanigan. He was standing in a dignified attitude in the very middle of the field, naked as the day he was born, save for a waist-cloth and the biggest pair of boots I ever saw. At his feet lay a football, and in his right hand was a glass of something to drink, which, between his sips, he used to beckon on his adversaries.

I crept further till I could hear his voice.

"Come on, sonnies! come on, boys!" it came persuasively. "*Idder 'h'ow!* I won't 'urt much—not to spake

of—*Kooch nay*—Come on, I says." Then, as his invitation was reluctantly accepted, he lunged out a wild kick, an awful howl followed, and yet another lanky Sikh retired rapidy, rubbing his shin. Whereat Private Flanigan laughed and took another sip triumphantly.

"*Bahoot utcha!*"—the rollicking tones were a trifle thick —"Now you're learning, I tell yer—yer 'ardening like a hegg in 'ot water. And you'll soon get useter it. You won't remember it when yer sees the leather a-sailing through the uprights. No, yer won't! No more nor a woman for joy as a man is born into the wurrld. Hello! ye divvle—ye would, would ye?"

This was to an enterprising youth who thought to take advantage of a prolonged drink to sniggle the ball.

I lay and laughed. I couldn't help it. Flanigan wasn't a big man, but he was brawny, and the Sikhs, twice his height, had such temptingly long shins!

I watched the lesson of how to defend the globe until, after several replenishings of the glass he held, Private Flanigan's dignity became portentous, and his lunge a little wide.

Evidently, however, he was not too far gone to recognise the fact, for suddenly he sat down, still guarding the ball with his wide-spread legs, and called for a pipe, a pillow, and a punkah.

All three were instantly forthcoming, and as I cautiously re-climbed the hill, I saw Private Flanigan enjoying his ease in the centre of an admiring circle of pupils.

As I made my way home, I puzzled over what I had best do. Of course, it was easy to report to my captain, but, by so doing, I should get a lot of men into trouble over what was, in reality, a huge joke. Anyhow, before I did so report, I determined to find out whether Private Flanigan had absconded *himself*, or had been stolen.

So the next evening, having carefully taken the bearings of our valley in miniature the day before, I went over after work hours. When I came on the level at the bottom, I found that quite a large wood slab shed had been erected at one end of the little bit of greensward. As I crossed towards it the familiar sound of really good clog dancing

met my ears accompanying a rollicking baritone voice that was singing the refrain of a patter song:

"Kick an' 'ammer away at their shins,
"Silly old dribblers as cole' cream their skins,
"Barkin', lurkin', shirkin' Gher*kins*,
"Give 'em a crush and a rush for their sins,
"Yoicks! hey forward! ! !—the Sicki wins."

A perfect bellow of applause was following as I opened the slab door and walked in. There was a regular stage at the end of the shed, and on it stood Tim Flanigan, bowing his acknowledgments to an audience of squatting Sikhs with much dignity. A flimsy muslin overcoat partially hid his massive muscles and he was garlanded with flowers like a prize ox at a show. He did not notice me at first, and began a speech in true music hall style, his hand on his heart:

"My kyind patrons, an' you Gintlemen of the Press, it is with the hutmost diffidence that I roise to drink me own 'elth, you, gintlemen, bein' by birth and descent tay totallers, which is better by a long chalk than being answered for by godfathers an' godmothers at your baptism. Gintlemen, I have but a few wurrds to say, so I will not detain you. Since I come 'ere—I mean since the woise decrays of a koindly Providence brought me to the wilderness, I 'ave endeavoured to do my dooty by you, an' I done it. Gintlemen! you are a credit to me. There ain't a 'ole skin amongst the lot of your shins. Gintlemen! it is a thing to be proud of. It makes the tear come to my watery heyes an' sends the life blood to the tip of my nose. I tell you, gintlemen, that if any of thim officer chaps were to step in this moment——" Here his eye caught mine. The change was instantaneous, and he brought himself up to the salute smartly.

"Beg pardon, sir," he went on, without the least sign of embarrassment. "Havin' bin h'absent without leave, sir, this fortnight past through being kidnapped outrageous, I 'as to report myself."

I mustered up what gravity I could, for his attitude of respectful and disciplined attention was excruciatingly funny in contrast with his costume—or rather the lack of it.

"Private Flanigan," I said. "Have done with tom-foolery. How the devil do you come here?"

"I didn't come, sir," he replied volubly. "I was brought, s'help me Moses. I was kidnapped outrageous, as I said, by them Sickies, same as seethin' it in its mother's milk. I was, entirely, sir—sure the bla'gards won't deny it."

Here, *havildar* Sunt Singh, who understood English, broke in rapidly in Hindustani. "He speaks truth, Huzoor. He did not come of himself. He was brought hither when he was without consciousness."

"From drink, I suppose?" I asked severely.

Havildar Sunt Singh paused a moment. "Huzoor," he said at last, solemnly. "In a world of illusion it is difficult to reach truth; but one thing is certain, by the blessing of God he was extremely without consciousness. Was it not so, brothers?" he continued, appealing to two *naicks* and another *havildar* who were also standing to attention. Their corroborative "*Be-shakks*" rang out smartly, like a rifle shot.

"That is all very well," I continued, sternly addressing the culprit-in-chief. "If they kidnapped you, they'll have to answer for it; but that is no excuse for you stopping here. You can't pretend you're a prisoner, you know."

I glanced round as I spoke, and Flanigan's eyes followed mine. There was a bed in one corner, a chair, a washhand-stand, an assortment of Europe tins, a box of cigars in a rough set of shelves, while on one side of the stage stood a table, elaborately laid for dinner, with a tablenapkin folded into the form of a peacock!

There was a pause. Then candour came to Private Flanigan's aid—almost pathetic candour.

"Well! it weren't exactly uncomfortable, you see, sir," he said, with a deprecating smile; and I had to admit the justice of his plea. It *was* more comfortable than being packed like a herring in a barrel in a bell tent. I had, moreover, thought the matter out, and had come to the conclusion that the less said about it the better. So I gave Private Flanigan the option of taking the pledge, and returning to duty, making the best excuse he could for his absence, or being sent for officially.

He chose the former, to the great delight of the Sikhs, who, as he had said, were teetotallers to a man, and who naturally did not want to get into trouble over the business.

Next morning Private Flanigan reported himself to my captain. He was bare-foot, travel-stained, weary, and he had the most cock-and-bull story I ever heard of how he had spent the last ten days.

"If there had been any liquor shop within two hundred miles I wouldn't believe him," said my captain in an injured tone, "but there isn't—and no man is such a fool as to stop out in this wild country for nothing."

So the tale passed muster. Had I known, however, of the richness of the culprit's imagination, I doubt whether I should have given him such a field for it; for the story of the "loss of Private Flanigan" became a recognised entertainment, even for the Gherkins, and night after night he gave a different version of it to delighted admirers. I ventured once to remonstrate with him, and hint that capture by cannibals was hardly correct; but his unconsciousness was supreme.

"S'elp me Moses, sir," he said. "You don' know wot I bin through. They'd have eat me, sure enuff, if I 'adn't happen to 'ave my big boots on."

A fortnight afterwards we finished the work, but before we left our jolly little camp we had a football Saturday. The Sikhs came down in force, and licked the little Ghurkas all to smithereens.

"They must a 'ad some un to teach 'em 'ow to charge, sir," said Private Flanigan sorrowfully to the captain.

The captain looked at me, and I looked at the captain. But I said nothing, for Flanigan had been as sober as a judge since I found him.

REX ET IMP:

I

"Rex will get on all right," said Muriel Alexander pettishly, "you know quite well, Horace, that so long as he has old Bisvâs he wants nothing else. Look at him now! He is quite happy, and the old man would die rather than let any harm happen to the child."

Horace Alexander frowned slightly as he looked through the wide set door of his office room to the verandah beyond. It was a very neat, natty, office room, severely correct and Western in its pigeon-holes, its files, its elegant upholstered chair at the further side of the writing table ready for the confidential visitor. No guns defiled it; no tennis bats, no half-used box of cigars, no general litter of unofficial male humanity such as most Indian office rooms in the past have permitted, was to be seen within the precincts sacred to duty, for Horace Alexander was that curious product of modern times, a clever and advanced man, bent upon progress, who stickles for the commonplace conventional etiquette in all things. So he stirred uneasily at the sight he saw beyond his office doors, dropped his eye-glasses and put them on again petulantly.

Yet it was rather a pretty sight.

A red-haired, fuzzy-headed child of four or five, small, but strong and sturdy, seated with the utmost dignity on a red velvet cushion, his broad freckled face wearing an expression of conscious majesty, part of which was doubtless due to the insecurity of a gilt paper band which was perched on his goldy-red curls.

Before him, in an attitude of prayerful adoration, squatted a very very old man. At his full height he must still have been tall, and the bent shoulders were broad; broad enough to show up the line of war-medals on the breast of his orderly's coat. They gave the new scarlet

cloth a certain personal *cachet* and toned down its official garishness.

"Come here, Rex!" called Horace Alexander, and the child rose at once. Though high-spirited and a bit of an imp, he was a reasonable, obedient, little chap enough; obedient because he was reasonable.

"What's that you've got on your head?" queried his father irritably.

"It's my c'wown," replied Rex cheerfully. "Bisvâs cut it out for me; and he's goin' to put b'wown paper to make it 'weal stiff—c'wowns onghter be stiff, 'weal stiff, oughtn't they? an' he's going to put things on it like the pictures in the papers, an' then I shall be a 'weal King, shan't I?"

"No, my boy!" said his father sharply. "Crowns don't make kings; remember that always. There was Charles the First——"; then he paused, recognising he was out of the child's depth; and the cult of the weaker brother was not often forgotten by Horace Alexander. It was the secret of his popularity; but how he managed to reconcile it with his passion for progress remained rather a mystery to some people.

"And what were you doing," he continued.

"I wasn't doin' nothin' except be king," replied the child; "but Bisvâs was doin' '*durshan*.' What is a '*durshan*,' daddy, 'weally?"

The childish forehead was all puckered beneath its crown, and Rex's father, for all he was entitled to linguistic letters after his name, hesitated.

"Sight," he began, "ur—appearance—ur—aspect——"

But Rex shook his head in disapproval. "Bisvâs says it's just for all the same as seein' God—didn't you, Bisvâs?"

The liquid Urdu to which the little fellow's voice turned, echoed through the sunshine to where the tall old trooper, risen to his full height, stood smiling.

"Huzoor! so it is, without doubt. The sight of a King is even as the sight of a God. It is a revelation of the Most High."

"Good Lord!" muttered Horace Alexander under his breath, yet with an amused smile. "The child will grow up a feudal serf combined with a feudal lord, if we don't

take care, Muriel! He is too much with old Bisvâs—You'd better take him with you—or—or not go."

His wife did not even frown: her position was too assured in the household for her to be even alarmed. "Of course I must go. I must wear my new frocks. Besides, you forget I'm President of the Veiled-Women's-Guild, and they are going to present a casket. And there isn't room in the Hotel for Rex—I was lucky to get *one* for myself this morning—besides, it would be bad for him. Of course, when you were going with tents and all that it was different; but now that you've been told to stop—Really, Horace, it is most annoying! What can it mean? There is nothing wrong in the district, is there?"

Horace Alexander's eyeglass dropped again. It generally did when he was asked for a personal opinion; not from any lack of decision in the man himself, but from that habit of relying on collective as against individual thought which distinguishes so many clever men nowadays; as if the mediocre mass could ever outvalue superior sense.

"I cannot conceive that anything serious can be wrong," he began, then paused almost pathetically before the certainty that his district was admittedly the best managed in the province. "However," he continued, virtuously remembering that the communication which stopped his going to the Big Durbar was strictly confidential, "that is neither here nor there. I have my orders, so that ends it, and——" he glanced out to the verandah where the "*durshan*" had re-commenced—"I suppose Rex had better remain, if you think it safe. I shall be very busy——"

His wife laughed, and stooping over his chair, kissed the top of his head; it was a trifle bald.

"You dear old stupid," she said kindly. "You've nothing to do with it. I wouldn't leave him if it wasn't for old Bisvâs! You and I, Horace, have grown out of—what shall I call it—feudal relations—but we can understand them. You don't suppose I leave the boy in your charge, do you? No! My dear man! you're not up to it. But Bisvâs! Bisvâs was your grandfather's servant when he was a boy, and he swears Rex is the living image of '*Jullunder*

Jullunder baba,' whom, I verily believe, he mixes up with Alexander the Great! It doesn't do the child any harm, though it makes him a bit autocratic now. He'll grow out of being King at school. And really it is a pretty sight to see him with his bodyguard of those marvellous old dodderers Bisvâs rakes up from the bazaar——"

"I've seen them," replied her husband gloomily. "I'd have sent them about their business if they hadn't been old pensioners—and in uniform——"

Muriel laughed again. "Such uniforms! But they are magnificent to the child and he's magnificent to them. It's all right, Horace. He is as pleased as Punch, because I've allowed him, as he can't go to Delhi, to have a sham coronation here."

"My dear!" protested her husband; but at that moment an old-fashioned buggy, with a flea-bitten Arab in the shafts, drew up, and Mrs. Alexander discreetly withdrew before an official visitor.

Ere five minutes were over the new comer rose from the upholstered chair, went to the four doors of the office room, looked round for possible eavesdroppers, closed them, then sate down again; for John Carruthers, the Superintendent of Police, was of the old school. He suspected everybody. In his heart of hearts Horace Alexander loathed him: or rather, his methods; but he had to admit that he was an excellent police officer. Short and stout, he looked as if he had a trace of native blood in him, anyhow, none understood the ways of Indian wickednesses better than he.

"This is serious," he said briefly. "I always told you, sir, you would have to face it some time." Then he paused. "I wonder if anyone realises the relief it will be to our force when the whole show goes off well—as it will do! But there's always that off chance—and here is one——"

"I don't believe it," said Horace Alexander stubbornly; "it is unthinkable, inconceivable——"

John Carruthers raised his shaggy eyebrows. "Nothing, sir, is inconceivable in India. There's a lot of lees in four thousand years of civilisation. So long as it's stagnant, well and good; but if you stir 'em up—However! you don't

agree. And *this*——" he touched the confidential communication—"has got to be seen to."

"Yes! it has got to be seen to—wrong or right," echoed the younger man firmly. Outside, the sunshine shone in sultry drowsy peace; but within the closed office room, the air seemed vibrant, as the two, mutually responsible for so much in their world, looked into each other's eyes in perfect unanimity. So it is often in India nowadays; something has to be done and old and new must combine to the doing of it.

"Hullo! what's up?" asked the Superintendent of Police when, having offered to drive his official superior down to the city, they stepped into the verandah; and then he smiled. "The youngster seems to be enjoying himself, eh!"

Under the *sirus* trees on the opposite side of the drive were drawn up five old men, headed by Bisvâs, who stood next something that was more like a monkey than a man; for Bhim Singh, even when he had been the most swaggering *havildar* in a Ghurka regiment, had never been tall, and was now almost incredibly shrunken and old. But his eyes still looked out sharp and bright from his wizened face and his military salute shot out smartly at the sight of the masters.

"It is all old Bisvâs' fault," excused Rex's father, giving a disturbed look at his son and heir, who—with the gilt paper circlet still on his fuzzy head—was apparently drilling the ancient warriors, "I've told my wife that it's a mistake, but you see, Bisvâs looked after my grandfather when they were kids together, and so——"

"And so," interrupted John Carruthers with a chuckle, "you have the most valuable asset in the world! If I were you I would encourage it! Good Lord! man!——" he forgot etiquette for the moment—"that sort of thing is the safety of—of everything"

So the two men drove off to the office, to confer secretly with other good men and true, and the child, with the gold circlet on his fuzzy hair, stood in the half shade, half shine of the *sirus* trees, and dressed his army autocratically. And the old warriors—there was Bisvâs who had fought at

Sobraon, and Bhim Singh who had fought everywhere indiscriminately for sheer love of fighting, and old Imân, the hair of whose body still stood on end as he told tales of how he had waged war for the Sirkar against his own brothers in Mutiny time, and Pir Khan, Yusufzai, who still talked of *Nikalseyn sahib* as if he were not dead, and last but not least, most ancient of all, a nameless fossil of humanity called by the others "*Baba*" (father), who bewailed the fact that he had not been at both sieges of Bhurtpore—these all obeyed the child's orders, and nodded and winked and swore that he was the living spit and image of "*Gineral Jullunder Jullunder Sahib Bahadur*," who had led them to victory again and again. The smallest cavalry officer in *Jân Kampâni's* army; but the bravest and the best loved!

II

Three days had passed, and once again the two men sate facing each other in the tidy, conventional office room. The confidential box was open and papers littered the table; but the hint of possible trouble remained still a mere hint.

"And yet," said John Carruthers thoughtfully, "I don't like it. I told you about that temple incident? Quite a trivial affair, but in my experience—and that is pretty wide, sir—that sort of thing always means something. But the fact is, I haven't time——" his bright eyes grew restless—"to unearth anything."

Horace Alexander smiled. "Because, my dear fellow, there is nothing to unearth. I told you so from the beginning. I am pretty well up in my own district, Carruthers——"

"That you may be, sir; but pure anarchism isn't a thing of districts: it's—what do they call it?—a *zeit geist*! How many fools do you suppose are in your towns and villages, sir? Well! everyone of them is a danger if there is a good

agitator within hearing. Anyhow, I am so far dissatisfied, that I am going to propose to you a plan——" He got up as he had done before, closed every door after a good look round for eavesdroppers, and finally paused before little Rex, who was sitting in a corner of the room, playing with a pen and paper and some red and black ink which his father had given him. His mother having gone off to the Big Show, which was to take place next day, the little fellow had been tearful and needed consolation. Now, however, he appeared quite absorbed in his occupation.

"What are you doing, Rex?" asked John Carruthers.

The child held up a round of white paper with cabalistic signs on it.

"I'm makin' a medal to give to my army," he said with importance. "And 'Wex' is to be in 'wed and so's 'Imp.' Then 'et' will be black, don't you see?"

The men laughed, and settled themselves over the railway map which John Carruthers spread out on the table.

"You see," said the police officer in a low voice, "the Royal train focusses anxiety according to these hints——" he pointed to the confidential papers—"and I can't help a feeling that they are right. I've got a sort of second-sight in these ways—perhaps because I was born and brought up in the country—and I believe there is something in it. I'd ferret it out if I'd time; but I haven't. So why run risks? The Royal train is timed to run the sixty odd miles through your district on the *direct* line between three and five a.m. to-morrow morning—just before dawn. Now why should it? Why shouldn't it do the eighty odd miles of the loop line?"

"But that would bring it right here—right in the very heart——" interrupted Horace Alexander.

"That wouldn't matter, provided *nobody knew*," came the quick reply. "And nobody need know—except, of course, the railway bosses. Just look at it on the map. Points changed at Barâwal Junction—then straight away, past us, to the northern branch, and so back a bit—only a bit—to the main line again. It wouldn't delay them half an hour, if that——"

Horace Alexander's finger traced out the line on the map.

"But the direct line is guarded," he began.

"Inadequately," persisted John Carruthers, "at least, to my mind. Now, by taking this new loop you are safe. It only needs a telegram—for the trains haven't begun yet to run at night, and it will be 'line clear' all through. The usual pilot engine, of course—so no one need know."

Horace Alexander nodded. "No! poor devils!" he assented, a bit irrelevantly, "and dozens of them would have rejoiced to do '*durshan.*'"

The child in the corner of the room looked up at the familiar word and listened.

But the men were too much immersed to notice him.

"Well, it may be wise!" said Horace Alexander at last. "I don't agree with you, Carruthers, of course. The whole thing's a mare's nest. But, as you say, it won't disarrange anything. The Royal train will be up to time for early tea at Sonabad, and there all is safe: so if you'll drive me down to the telegraph office, I'll send the cipher myself."

"H'm," said John Carruthers thoughtfully, "I wouldn't cipher. Don't trust 'em a bit. The clerks in my office know 'em, I'm sure. Try French—it's safer."

Horace Alexander laughed a superior laugh.

"Mine don't! not the *real* confidential one. Why! I don't suppose you do."

"That's a different matter," replied the police officer drily. "However! it's for you to decide."

"Yes," said the District Officer firmly. "Well! good-night, Rex! I shan't be back, child, till breakfast to-morrow."

"Where are you going, Daddy?" asked the boy.

"I'm going to do *durshan*," replied his father carelessly.

The child rose and came towards the table with shining eyes, the medal in his hand.

"Daddy!" he said, "I should like to do '*durshan*' too. Mayn't I?"

His father shook his head and smiled. "Impossible, Rex! You can't ride forty miles over the desert along a railway as I shall, can you? You wouldn't like to do what Daddy's got to do to-night, I can tell you, young man!

Wait a while! Your turn'll come." He was busy locking the confidential box.

"But I meant *here*, Daddy," persisted the child.

"Here?" echoed his father carelessly, "Oh! here! Yes! You and old Bisvâs can amuse yourselves with doing *durshan* as much as you like. Now good-night—and—and be sure to say your prayers, Rex." He stooped down to kiss the child, and as he did so, "*Rex Imp*" in red with the *et* in black, caught his eye. "Rex, Imp," he muttered, "not a bad name for you, though you're a good little chap on the whole."

And he went off, feeling virtuous. Whatever his own beliefs, or rather lack of belief, might be, no one could say that he was forcing it prematurely on the weaker brother. Perhaps, however, the thought that his little son's lips—which had never to his knowledge been soiled by a lie—had begged dear God to take care of his Daddy, was unconsciously a help to the man during the anxious night. For it was anxious. To be responsible meant much to both those men, and this sudden change of plan—though it certainly removed risk—threw a still heavier burden of care on the shoulders of those two who had suggested it.

Therefore, when, just as the primrose dawn of another day had begun to dissipate the shadows of the night, the Royal train, safe and sound, steamed into the station at Sonabad, Horace Alexander and John Carruthers looked at each other as they stood on the platform and positively laughed.

"That nightmare's over," said the latter.

"I always said it was a mare's nest," replied the former.

"Well! we needn't quarrel about it now. I've handed over charge to Evesham, and you to Coleridge, and that's all. And I shall be glad to have a cup of tea. I've been too busy to eat for the last few days."

Half-an-hour afterwards they were in Horace Alexander's motor, going full speed along the Grand Trunk road.

"We shall be back by breakfast time," said John Carruthers, whose thoughts ran upon food.

But Horace, as he steered his way past the long lines of lumbering wains laden with corn, which still, in India,

cling to the roads, despite railways, was jubilant over his district.

"I told you it was all right," he said finally, "but you and your sort, Carruthers, can't see that we are in a new age. We are out of the past——"

"That doesn't look like it," interrupted John Carruthers, pointing to a group in the verandah; for at that moment the car swept easily into the gateway of Horace Alexander's house. The latter frowned, for Rex's army was awaiting them, drawn up to stiff military salute, while in front of them, his small broad face full of smiles, was Rex himself holding a box in his hand.

"We got it, Daddy!" he shouted. "We got it all 'wight, and the men 'wan away, and Baba-jee emptied it, because he was the older-est, and it's all quite 'wight."

"Good God," cried John Carruthers, leaping out of the car, his eyes almost out of his head. "It's an infernal machine. I—I—I—'ve seen—'em—before—I—I——"

Horace Alexander turned pale as ashes. "Put it down, Rex. Gently—gently—but—but——"

Old Bisvâs salaamed down to the ground. "The Presence need not fear. The child did not touch it, of course, till the poisonous thing had been emptied of its venom."

"But how——" began Horace Alexander helplessly.

John Carruthers, however, had his wits about him, and said in a low voice, "Look here, sir! This had better be kept dark; for the present, anyhow."

Old Imân, who understood a little English, nodded approvingly. "Without doubt it is a concealed word," he said suavely. "And so I told Bisvâs. Therefore none know of it save those here present. So we had to do often in Mutiny time when news meant much; and *Gineral-Jullunder-Jullunder-sahib-bahadur* would say——"

The police officer cut the old man's reminiscence short. "You have done well, *risildar-jee*," he said curtly, but the praise brought an unwonted flush to the withered cheek. "We'd better hear the story *in camera*, sir."

So the five old warriors filed into the office room, the doors were shut, and Rex sate on his father's knee, while

John Carruthers carefully examined the infernal machine which had been laid on the table.

"Paris," he said laconically, "one of the latest sort. What did I tell you, sir—anarchy isn't a thing of districts."

"Go on, Bisvâs!" replied Horace Alexander evasively.

"As I was saying, Huzoor, when the Huzoor left to do *durshan* last night, *Jullunder Baba* came to me and said, 'Bisvâs! get ready to go and do *durshan* likewise; my father said I might——'"

"And you did, daddy, didn't you?" broke in the little lad's voice confidently. His father hesitated, then remembering his uncomprehending words, nodded and held the child closer.

"So I, knowing that the word of *Jullunder Baba* is even as the word of a King, unbreakable, said, 'But whither, my lord?' And he said, 'That will I show thee! Do thou as thou art bid, slave!' Now the night, as the Huzoor knows, was dark, and I grow old. So I bethought me of help, lest evil should befall. Therefore I said, 'Lo! it is not meet to go without the Army.' So these came willingly. For, see you, Protector of the Poor, we are all old, and the *durshan* is even as the sight of a god—it heals sin. Therefore, in the darkness we set off, and I wrapped the *chota sahib* in blankets and took the *trick* lamp and a *ternus* of hot milk also——"

John Carruthers looked up.

"He means electric and thermos," said Horace Alexander, with an odd sort of cackle in his voice; something seemed to have risen in his throat and prevented his speaking clearly.

"We carried the *chota sahib* by turns, seeing there might have been serpents in the way," continued the old man, "and made for the railway, since that was all the direction *Jullunder Baba* would give. Then Imân, remembering the old tomb—the Huzoor will remember it also, since there was a case about it in his court——"

"And the Huzoor," broke in Imân, "decided virtuously, that being the tomb of a saint, it should stand, and the railway move——"

"Remembering it," went on old Bisvâs, "he said, 'It

would give shelter to the child.' So thither we went, and there the *chota sahib*, having remembered he had not said his prayers as he had promised the Huzoor, said them. He knelt, Huzoor, on that slab, lest the floor should be damp——"

"Yes," assented the child's father as the old man paused. Once again there was that lump in his throat. He saw, as in a vision, the old Mahomedan tomb rearing its half-ruined dome so close to the railway—the white-faced child praying God to bless everyone he loved, those dark faces standing round reverently.

"Lo!" continued old Bisvâs gently, "I think the saint down below must have heard—Imân says he did—for what followed was of no man's making. We were all drowsing in the tomb—'tis a good five miles from the Huzoor's bungalow to the railway, for all it goes so near to the city—when *Baba-jee*—he hath the ears of a mouse still—said 'Hist!'

"So I looked out, and there were men—five or six of them, on the line. Then it came to me what the ill-begotten hounds had been doing in Bengal, and a sort of fury seized on me. So I crept back. *Jullunder Baba* was asleep among the blankets on the tomb slab, but I whispered the others, and they unbuckled their swords and made ready."

The faces of the four old warriors who, standing two on one side two on the other of the speaker, had watched his every word, were a study. Exultation, pride, absolute satisfaction showed in every line of them, and the lean old fingers gripped their sword-hilts once more.

"Then *Baba-jee* gave the word—he was '*senior-orfficer*,' and—and—Huzoor, they ran away!!!"

Even John Carruthers' chuckle had a suspicion of a sob in it.

"And then! Oh! hero!" he said, "what then?"

"Huzoor! I looked out over the desert and far, far away on the straight line I saw light. And there was a faint rumble in the air. It was a train. Mayhap the *chota sahib* had been right, mayhap it was the Train-of-Majesty! So I turned on the 'trick lamp,' and there it was on the line—that thing—it had a string to it that lay

on the rail. And—and—Huzoor! my memory fails me—There was the child, and there was the train!—I had to decide——

"Then I cried to Imân, 'Quick! the *chota sahib*! Run far with him—far!—far!' So when that was done I up with my sword and I smote the string that lay on the rail!——" he paused, then went on—

"So that was done also; and Imân brought the child back, and the train sped past, and we all stood in a row and did *durshan*; though I know not if it was *durshan* or not, since, mayhap, it was not the Royal train after all."

The old eyes looked almost wistfully at those two men in office, but the child's were on his father's confidently:

"But it *was* the Royal train, wasn't it, daddy?" said the child's voice, and Horace Alexander's answered huskily:

"Perhaps it was, Rex; anyhow, you and the others did *durshan*. Of that I am sure."

Content settled to those two faces, the old and the young, and the ancient warrior went on—

"Then there was nothing to do, Huzoor, save to come home and bring the poisonous thing with us. I was for sending the *chota sahib* on in Imân's care and carrying the thing myself; but *Jullunder Baba* would not go without it. So Bhim and the Father took the devil's box apart lest it should kill everyone, and with Bhim's *kukri* they prized it open"—a faint sigh came from the Europeans—"and spilt the witches' brew in the sand. That is all, Huzoor! Your slaves did what they could. The men ran away so fast, it was not possible for us, aged ones, to pursue them."

"But," broke in the most aged, "they were dressed like the Huzoors—in trousers, and my sword was bloody, so I must have hit someone."

"And so was mine," said each of the ancient warriors in turn.

Horace Alexander cleared his throat.

"Really!" he began, "I scarcely know how to thank——"

"Daddy!" said Rex's eager voice, "I know! I'm goin' to give each of 'em my army medal with '*Wex* and

Imp in 'wed, and *et* in black on it; an' they'll be orful pleased—won't you, Army?"

"Huzoor!" The old arms were stiff in salute, and then the oldest voice struck up quaveringly. "Lo! *sahibân*! it is enough for us that we have done *durshan* ere death. It brings contentment, even though both sieges of Bhurtpore is denied to some of us."

As, led by Rex, they marched out to the verandah, the two officials looked at one another.

But they said nothing for a minute. Then John Carruthers burst out:

"Damn the cipher! I told you it wasn't safe. Look here, sir, we must keep this quiet for the time."

Horace Alexander nodded.

THERE AROSE A MAN

This was one of the many stories which Nathaniel James Craddock told me in the cab of his engine while we used to go up and down that ribbon of red brick metalling edged with steel which was slowly laying itself out over a wide sandy desert.

Some of these were tragic, some comic, some betwixt and between; but most of them were worth the re-telling, especially as told by him. But the discursiveness of his method does not lend itself to print, so they all suffer in the process; even though, as I write, I seem to hear the steady grind of the engine, to feel the fine fretting of a sand storm on my cheek, and see the clear blue eyes looking at me with a keenness which always came as a surprise out of that bleared dissipated face.

"It was 'arter I 'ad that peep o' the Noo Jerusalem, sir, at the bottom o' the King's Well, 'as I come upon pore old 'Oneyman. I was a bit on the loose, you see, sir; them sort o' peeps wakes up the spiritooal nater o' a man, an' it's heads I win, tails you lose, if 'e takes to prayers or to drink. I tuk to the latter"—here he gave a slight cough, and added gently—"more nor usual. An' so I come across 'Oneyman. 'E'd 'ad a peep o' hell, sir, for 'e'd seen 'is wife's dead body lyin' where he'd left 'er safe an' sound waitin' for 'er baby to be born in doo time." There was always a biblical twang about Craddock's recitations which gave them a mournfully dignified tone. "'E 'ad friends in 'igh places, sir, an' one o' them, w'en he come through 'is brain fever, made 'im Conservancy Inspector down Bandelkhand way. It wasn't the place for 'im. They was wot they call Suckties, sir, down there, though there was precious little o' the babe an' sucklin' about *their* methods, but contrariwise, battle an' murder an' sudden death. They was for ever killin' goats an' kids, an' smearin' ole Mother Kâli with blood—never knew such chaps for paintin' the town red! So the *Khush-boo sahib*,* as they call him in their topsy turvey way, since it weren't perfoom but real stinks

* Pleasant smell.

down by them temple steps, couldn't never forget the sights he see in Mutiny time. When 'e was in 'is cups, 'e'd sit an' cry about it; for 'e was a little bit of a man, sir, the smallest man as ever I see, an' all wrinkled like an' wizened; just for all the world the same as the monkeys as used to come down in crowds on feast days, an' leg it with the orferings folk used to bring to ole Mother Kâli. That's 'ow 'Oneyman come on reduction, as the sayin' is; tho', pore chap, them as look on 'is face might a-seen that 'e wasn't for long; not even if they'd made 'im Guv'ner-General-in-Council; for what with—savin' your presence, sir—a galloping consumption, both o' drink an' lungs, 'e was wearin' away like snowdrifts in summer." Here Craddock paused to whistle a familiar tune. "Beg pardin, sir, but it comes home to me so, for he was awful fond of 'is wife. Well! whether it was 'is name—'Oneyman, you know, sir, being the God o' monkeys*—or whether it was 'is nater, he was uncommon kind to the *bunder logue*. Used to say they was the only Christians in the place, 'cos they wouldn't 'ave no meat offered to hidols, sir. An' it's true as gospel, sir, they wouldn't. You should a' seen them waitin' in the trees, and hover the arches an' crocketty things on the temples, while three or four smug Brahmins was going the rounds with a party o' country folk, full up o' sugar candies, an' parched rice, an' platters o' curds to leave at each 'oly spot. It was a rare sight; for, you see, the monkeys were 'oly too, an' the priests dursn't even 'eave a brick at 'em.

"They 'ad just to lump it when the beasts 'oofed away with all the best things afore their very eyes. An' 'Oneyman used to amoose himself of an evening by sittin' on the steps an' larfin' fit to split. I told 'im it weren't perlite; but there! it ain't no use talkin' to a man as has seen 'is wife lyin' dead.

"Then one day an ole buck monkey 'oofed it with a bag of rupees, an' dropped it, as 'e was climbin' a tree, above 'Oneyman's 'ead. And 'Oneyman, being in no state to know 'is own 'and, much less wot it 'eld, gathered some of 'em up, an' swore 'e'd keep 'em. That's 'ow it was. So 'e

* Hanooman.

got the sack: though anyone as had eyes might a-seen it was the weddin' garment o' a shroud *he* was wantin', pore chap.

"I was runnin' ballast then on a bit o' new line that was cuttin' its way through jungle land, yard by yard an' inch by inch. It give one a sorter shock, sir, every day, as I come up with my trucks, to find the engine goin' so much further, an' yet to get 'eld up at last by the same ole blocking o' trees an' creepers an' butterflies an' all that. Seemed as though there wasn't nothin' else before one, and as if it wasn't no use trying to get through with it. But they give me good wage, specially after they tuk to runnin' o' nights too, so I was able to put my hand into my breeches pocket when 'Oneyman said, 'You don't 'appen to 'ave a five-rupee about you, do'ee Craddock, for I ain't got a feather to fly with.' Then my stoker tuk sick an' I managed ter get 'Oneyman as *local demon*. It didn't 'urt no one, you see, sir, for I done both works without turnin' more 'airs than 'ad to turn with two shirts, one dryin' the other; an' it give 'Oneyman time to die respectable an' quiet like at the back o' the lamp room in the junction where I 'ad my diggings. Not that it was much of a 'quiet and secluded 'ome for an invalid,' sir, specially after orders come to push on the work as much as may be before His Honner the Guv'ner or some such bigwig, I disremember which, come on tower. Still, 'e got a sight better, an' I used to tote 'im about as stoker up an' down the line, an' many a time as 'e see me 'angin' out my shirt to dry, 'e'd say, pitiful like, 'It had ought ter be mine; but I'd do as much for Nathaniel James Craddock if I could.' And he done it, sir, in the end, for I should a' lost my billet but for 'im.

"This is 'ow it 'appened. The monkeys weren't no better after 'Oneyman left, but rather the worse. They was more Christian-like than ever, an' wouldn't 'ave no bowings down in the house of Rumnings. It got so bad as the Suckties couldn't stand 'em no more; but it was some leeches as a down-country man brought as done the trick at last. I don't mean proper blood leeches, sir, but them whited-sepulcre-the-other-way-round fruits as is marocky leather outside, an' my golly! in—Well! the 'ead bottle-washer Brahman, 'im as they called the Gossoon—though

w'y, I can't say, since the only gossoon I ever 'eard tell on was a Hirish gentleman in the Colleen Bawn—was dead on leeches—'e was a real blood leech 'imself, if you like—but, though 'e kep 'is eye on them all the time 'e was palavering away about Mai Kâli an' Shiv-*jee*, the ole buck monkey was too much for 'im, an' 'e 'ad nothin' but the marocky leather trimmings as come floatin' down peaceful-like on 'is bald 'ead and big stummick as he stud dancin' with rage while *bunder-jee* was eatin' the my golly.

"That, as I said, done the trick. There was a gold-printed letter come from Mai Kâli ter say she was lonesome away in the jungles without 'er Hunoomân—or some such rot. Then 'is Honner the bigwig was coming, an' so on, an' so on. It ain't 'ard to do that sort o' thing, sir, w'en you don't have no Ten Commandments an' everyone is so accustomed to lying that it don't strike 'em as odd.

"How they done it, I don't know. All I know is that one moonlick night I saw the signal against me as I was running through to the junction with sand I'd bin far to fetch. And I didn't like it. I'd bin away two days without 'Oneyman, and bein' a bit lonesome I'd perraps had a drop too much. Or perraps it was the moonlick night as done it." Here Craddock's voice took on a hushed tone. "It wasn't like the Noo Jerusalem, sir, or them yaller bottles in the chimist's shop as I used to think was 'eaven when I was learning my dooty to my neighbour. There wasn't nothin' glittery about it, nothin' to make you think of the far away. It was there, right down beside you on the engine, cold an' clear, taking the colour out of every mortal thing, till there weren't no difference a'twixt earth an' sky; till the pin point of the pole star wasn't no brighter than—than the safety valve; for I keeps 'em bright, you see, sir." Here he laid his hand affectionately on the throttle. "So I wasn't that pleased at 'aving to 'old up, specially as I was a bit late and 'ad to get through the junction afore the Bigwig's train was due—for 'e was comin' that night.

"'Wot's up?' I sings out to the station-master, with an oath.

"'E laughed. 'Two truck load caged monkeys, zoological specimens rate, attendant priests in charge,

consigned to Mai Kâli. We'll hitch 'em on behind in no time. Superintendent's orders.'

"Well, sir! it was no use swearin'; so they was 'itched up, and I went on full steam, givin' them Brahmins a bit o' a swing, wot with the 'eavy sand in front an' the cages behind. The junction was all lit up an' decorated for the Bigwig, flags a-flying an' red baize all along the platform. 'E was to dine there, and the refreshment room looked A 1—a reg'lar spread, I call it. An' there was the Superintendent, waitin' in 'is best uniform——" Craddock paused as if to emphasise further remarks. "'E was a real bone-silly man—there ain't no other word for 'im, sir—bone-silly down to the last drop o' marrow. I dunno if it was the sight o' 'im, or the drink I 'ad on board, but I forgot to choke 'er down in time, an' we went over the points at a rattlin' pace.

"The sand, being 'eavy, took 'em steady, but the zoological consignment, being light, didn't. It ran off the rail, lurched into a shed, upset, and before you cud say 'knife' there was a matter of two 'undred or more o' the specimens let loose in that there junction."

He paused again and shook his head sorrowfully. "It ain't no use tryin' to describe it, sir. All you got to do is say ''ell an' tommy' and leave it alone.

"'Craddock!' shrieks the Superintendent, as I stud laughin' fit to split, as I see limber-legs at their old games, 'make that brute give up my helmet or I'll—I'll——' Then 'e got speechless, save for bad words, sir. You never see such a huproar. Red baize, tore to strips, festooning the roof, 'God bless our Bigwig' flutterin' in bits like a paperchase down the platforms, an' the mail train due in 'arf an hour.

"'You—you brought 'em 'ere, you scoundrel!' shrieks the Superintendent, 'take 'em away again or I'll—I'll——' an' again he refrained even from good words, sir. But 'e was bone-silly. Not as anyone cud do anything; leastways, not till 'Oneyman step out of the lamp room in 'is pyjamas, lookin' more dead nor alive. But there was somethin' in his hair, sir, as made me feel as a man had arose in Israel, for all he was so small.

"'You leave it to me,' he says, confident like; then he turns to the bone-silly Superintendent as stood dumb-

founded, staring at 'im as if 'e were Lazarus noo raised. 'There's five an' twenty minutes yet, sir,' he says, 'afore His Honner's train's doo. On *my* honner as Josiah 'Oneyman, I'll 'ave 'em safe out by then—only I won't 'ave no one a-interfering—everyone's got to obey my horders, and mine honly.'

"The bone-silly one hadn't a word to say, there was somethin' so awful majestic about the little man in 'is pyjamas, pore chap.

"Lordy, sir! you should 'ave 'eard him next with they Suckti Brahmins as was rubbing their bruises an' calling on Mai Kâli for assistance.

"'She ain't in it, sonnies, nor the chaps as you bamboozle, neither,' he said, said he. 'It's you as 'ave to make a offerin' yourselves this time, so it'll make a 'ole in your *pockets* as well as your *stummicks*, my boys. An' it's no use your saying you ain't got no rupees—your credit's good enough for that.' An' here he waved 'is 'and, sir, to the row o' sweetmeat-sellers' booths and stalls as was sot just outside the iron railings. You seen 'em, sir. You know 'ow they looks at night. Harf a dozen trays piled up full o' treacle stuff an' greese, with a hoil *butti* flaring an' smoking on the top of a pile o' their beastly toffee an' dribbling through it to give the dead flies a-stickin' to it a flavour. Yes! you've seen the '*met-aiy-yen-shee-yen*'"—here he gave an excellent rendering of the sweetmeat sellers' cry—"an' so've I—an' 'ad to eat it, too, w'en I was 'ard put to it. Well! 'e got the lot in, brass platters an' all, an' then began the rummiest go you ever see. W'en I was a boy, sir, in quires an' places w'ere they sing, parson use ter make us run through the service so as to get the Amens right up to time—it's 'arder nor runnin' a mail train, though you wouldn't believe it, sir. Well! they Suckti Brahmans 'ad to do the 'ole caboodle, same as if ole Mother Kâli was sitting like a spider with 'er eight red legs an' harms on the top of each sand-truck. For you see, sir, they was standin' fair an' square on the lines, engine's steam up, et cetera. It was a rare sight. The monkeys was fine an' pleased with the red baize an' the flags an' the motters, but the moment they 'eard them Brahmans begin to chant, they cock their tails an' listen, an' the ole

buck monkey 'e clomb crafty along the girders so's to be ready to drop down so soon's he could. But 'Oneyman 'ad 'is views, an' wasn't goin' to be give away prematoor; so 'e kep a Suckti gennoflexing by each platter o' toffee until every truck 'ad its altar. Then 'e clumb up to the engine, an' beckon me to foller.

"I was standin' with one fut on the step when he shouted to the Suckties, 'Hands off.' I give you my word, sir, it weren't 'arf a minute before them trucks was covered as black as flies with them monkeys, grabbing an' yelling an' searchin' out for *met-aiy-en-sher-een* like all possessed, for they were main hungry, 'avin' bin shut up all the arternoon. So there was our chanst, an' I was just leapin' in to put on steam, w'en that bone-silly ass of a Superintendent says, says 'e, 'You 'aven't got the baton.' An' sure 'nuff I 'adn't. For it was a single line, you see, sir, an' we 'ad to run a mile or two through a signal station afore branchin' off. Of course, I didn't ought to 'ave noticed 'is remark, but took the chance; but there it is! I was a bit on, an' I'd laughed fit to split my sides, let alone my 'ead. So I putt down my fut agin, an' made to go fetch it, when the engine she gave a screech an' started full speed. Whether 'Oneyman thought I was aboard, or whether he thought 'e 'ad no time to lose, I never knew, for after that 'twas no laughin' matter, I can tell you. But there wasn't much time, for as I run down the platform to 'urry up the baton, I see some o' the platters nigh empty already, an' they monkeys looking as if they were makin' ready to 'oof it. So when the screech come I turn back; but I was too late. She 'ad ten mile an hour on her afore I lep upon the back buffer, seeing there wasn't no other way o' getting along. An' then, sir"—Craddock drew his hand over his mouth, thoughtfully—"what come next sobered me in a jiffy. Talk o' the ride to Khiva! it wasn't in it to the ride I 'ad on the back buffer o' those sand trucks! Thirty, forty, fifty mile an hour, trundlin' along a consignment of A 1 devils from the nethermost 'ell. It was 'arf fright with them, sir, an' 'arf fury. As we scud past the signal station, full speed, I see the *babu* fall on 'is face, an' cry '*dohai! dohai!*' as if 'twere the Day o' Judgment.

"An' then, sir, I begun to think o' that blockin' o' trees an' creepers an' butterflies, as was sure to crop up somewhere, closer or furder, and to wonder if 'Oneyman knew w'en to put on the brake; for 'e was only a stoker an' not one at that. Lordy, sir, we must a-bin a queer sight, rushin' through the moonlick night, with the engine flarin' fit to bust, a full cargo of devils from 'ell dancin' an' whoopin' an' 'owlin' like all possessed, an' Nathanial James Craddock astride the hoff buffer. I tell you, sir, if any one 'ad said 'whip be'ind,' I'd a-got down; but I didn't want to leave pore old 'Oneyman off my own bat.

"So there we were; but the little fireflies didn't seem to care. I see 'em from the buffer as we flew past, eddyin' up an' down, an' round an' round, just twinklin' among the trees like the stars up aloft—just as unreasonable-like an' careless as if there wasn't nothin' to worry about in this world—and there ain't, sir, since all flesh is grass, as the man said to the vegetarian. And then we come to the beginning of the end o' the line, but there weren't no slackenin' down o' steam; so I prepare to jump——

"An' jump I did. When I come to myself the moonlick was as peaceful as the grave. The engine 'ad cooled down, an' there weren't no sign o' life anywhere. Only a 'eap of wreckage. I found pore old 'Oneyman lying dead, chucked clean out o' the cab. 'E 'adn't no mark on 'im, an' somehow it seemed to me as if 'e 'ad died natural afore we run slap bang into the blockin' o' trees. For 'e knew enuff about stokin', sir, to turn off steam. I wouldn't a-took 'im on if 'e 'adn't.

"But there weren't a sign o' them monkeys, sir; an' wot's more, there's never bin one seen in that there jungle since."

Here Craddock rose, yawned, and passed over to the cranks and handles and valves. The next instant an ear-piercing whistle rang through the dust-laden air, seeming to set it a-quiver.

"That's to rouse old Meditations, sir," he said cheerfully; "but it won't do it. 'E's petrified to 'is place, an' I shall 'ave to lift 'im out o' the way, as per usual."

From afar I could see, like a speck upon the receding ribbon of rail, an immovable figure on the Permanent Way.

DRY GOODS

"Mr. Blooker, sir," said the head clerk severely, "no one whose chest measurement is under thirty-two inches has any right to beat time to 'Rule, Britannia,' even when it is played by a German band in the street."

A small man whose desk stood nearest the office window, against which a City fog lay like yellow cotton wool, blushed, apologised incoherently, and returned to fair general averages.

The other clerks tittered, since this was a recurring criticism. For, though Alexander Blooker's chest measurement made active patriotism impossible, the heart within it was full of that sentiment. This was unmistakable when he boomed forth solid songs of the past, such as the "Death of Nelson" and the "Soldier's Tear," in his big solid bass voice; the more modern ditties about "beggars" and "gurls" and "kids" and "khaki" being, he assured his club, "unsuitable to his organ." And Alexander Blooker was very proud of his organ.

"Never, never, never will be slaves."

Quite unconsciously his dutiful pen punctuated each quaver and semi-quaver, though in his heart of hearts he knew that he himself had been a slave all his life. First to an old aunt who had lately died full of self-satisfaction because she left him fifty pounds out of the money she had saved from the earnings he had brought home to her all his working life; and secondly to the head clerk, Mr. Mossop. Such a kind, good——

"Blooker, please!" chanted the office boy, showing round the glass screen.

It was the voice of Fate. Wondering vaguely whether this unusual call to the innermost Holy of Holies, "Our Firm," presaged dismissal—possibly for punctuating patriotism—he went meekly.

And he returned as he went, to sit down solidly once more to fair general averages. The other clerks waited for a remark, but none came; so the pens scraped and scraped until time was up.

Then, when the office was empty, save for himself and Alexander, Mr. Mossop, the head clerk, went over to the latter's desk.

"We can finish that for you, Mr. Blooker," he said, "you have much to do."

"Thank you, sir," came the solemn reply, "I am much obliged to you, sir, but I would rather complete it myself, sir, before going to——" Then decorum gave way. "Mr. Mossop, sir," he continued wildly, "am I on my 'ed or on my 'eels? I can't believe it—and it is all your doing, sir. I feel sure 'Our Firm' wouldn't never have done it if you hadn't spoken for me, and—and—I don't know whether I am on my 'ed or my 'eels!"

As a rule Alexander Blooker struggled successfully with the accent of Cockaigne, but in times of stress, and especially when using certain set phrases, he adhered to it as if he felt it added forcefulness of expression.

There was a suspicion of a tear in his pale blue eye, and Mr. Mossop felt inclined to brace him up by telling him the truth; namely, that "Our Firm" contemplated in the near future closing the Distant Depot to the charge of which he had been appointed. Briefly, it did not pay: Germany had got at the markets in the way that Germany has, when competition is old-fashioned. But Alexander Blooker's face came up from the ledger over which it had bent itself for a moment with an expression on it that startled Mr. Mossop out of contemptuous compassion.

"I am going to run this job on my own, sir," he began eagerly; "I'm going to work it on Imperial lines——"

"H'm—we are not at the debating club, Mr. Blooker," interrupted the head clerk; but Alexander was beyond recall; his voice took on the blatant tone of the public speaker.

"Shrinkage in trade follows shortage in piece goods, and our piece goods is short. Germany's ain't. I don't say that 'Our Firm' is as bad as most, but there's a cool

quarter yard out of the forty for rubbage border and all that. Besides, mind you, some of 'em goes as far as three-quarters!—a *cool*-three-quarters!!—and why not? If you tike a hinch why not tike a hell!"

This was apparently quite conclusive, for the head clerk hastily changed the subject to the necessary preparations. But two days could be allowed, as the Distant Depot lay up a river that was only navigable for six months in the year; and four of these were already overpast. It was rather a rush, but the present occupant of the post had unexpectedly accepted the agency of a liquor shop; and the half-yearly market must not find "Our Firm" without a representative. So the first mail—it was a journey of six or seven weeks—must be the one. If any money was wanted—"Thank you, sir," replied Alexander Blooker; "the fifty pounds of my own that my aunt left me will do for the present: by-and-by perhaps——"

He looked mysterious, but he said no more to anyone; unless he whispered something to the glass case illustrating cotton manufactures in the Imperial Institute, which had always had an especial fascination for him. Despite his hurry, he was looking at the peculiarly broad borders of a pile of piece goods and muttering under his breath, "If you tike a hinch you may as well tike a hell," when a man of gold lace and buttons found him, after closing time, and hustled him by corridors of Imperial pickle bottle into the Sahara of Exhibition Road.

Within two months he was—to use his own expression—"taking down the shutters" in a very different desert. For the "Distant Depot" lay at the Back o' Beyont. Whereabouts in the World-Circle matters nothing. Briefly, it was one of those advancing tentacles of civilisation boasting the Mission-House, the Dry-Goods-Store or two and the Whisky-Shop, which carry between them civilisation to the aboriginal. Beyond it lay desolation, except for a single telegraph wire which spanned the void towards the west, instead of following the tortuous curves of the river (now sinking into sandbanks), which after a long course south-eastward eventually found itself at the same goal—the sea-board. There was no town to speak of; only a

cluster of leaf-huts, besides the Mission-House and Chapel, the two Stores and the Liquor-Shop. And these were so close clustered that to Alexander Blooker, when he rose to look out over his new world on the morning after his arrival, it seemed as if the bell which was being rung from the Chapel was a general invitation to pray, and buy, and drink.

But it was a pretty little place. A real oasis in the surrounding desert of sands, and almost bewilderingly green amidst thickets of banana trees.

A tall fat man showed in the verandah of the opposition.

"*Guten morgen, mien freund,*" he called, with superb indifference. "I gif you welcome."

That was doubtless Franz Braun, the German rival, and Alexander Blooker hated him at sight; but he kept his dignity.

"The same to you, sir," he replied stiffly, "I trust trade is good."

"It is goot for me," remarked Franz Braun, with an air for which Alexander Blooker could have kicked him. That being impossible owing to their relative sizes, the little man relieved his bellicose feelings by beginning on "'Twas in Trafalgar Bay." It still had for him the charm of novelty to be able to beat time when and where he chose.

"*Mein Gott!*" shouted Franz Braun excitedly over the way. "*Wass fur eine Stimme! Wunderbar!*"

It was the voice that did it. But for it the armed neutrality of the past between the rival firms might have remained in the future; as it was, an hour afterwards Alexander Blooker was politely but steadily refusing to sing a second to the "Wacht am Rhein," although Franz Braun (who had an equally good high tenor, after the fashion of tall burly men) wept on his shoulder and called him "*Bruderlein.*"

"You must to the pastor-house this evening," sighed the big creature at last, "Fraulein Anna, who is to the Pastor Schmidt daughter, will make you sing. She is *my verlobte. I* will to her be married, but she will make *you* sing."

Nevertheless, neither her yellow hair nor her blue eyes

beguiled Alexander Blooker from his fixed determination; but they sang together for half the night, and the memory of Fraulein Anna's soaring soprana, as the notes of "Oh! for the wings of a dove" floated into the hot air, was with him as, despite the lateness of the hour, he set all in readiness for the morrow. Since on the next day's doings much depended; for it was the yearly market-day, on which all the native traders from far and near came to buy goods. Alexander Blooker, in fact, had hurried his *doongah* up the sinking river so as to reach the Distant Depot in time for it. His last task was the undoing of one of the small bales which throughout their journey had been the objects of his special care.

"It you tike a' hinch you may as well tike the h'ell," he murmured, as he cut the packing threads by the dim light—for he had refused to use the "Made in Germany" lamp of his predecessor. Then, with a sigh of satisfaction, he held up the top one of the hard-pressed pile of printed cotton handkerchiefs.

"That ought to fetch 'em," he said admiringly. Certainly it might have "fetched" anything and everything. To use heraldic terms, the field of the kerchief was *gules, argent* and *azure*, arranged in *saltire*—otherwise, a Union Jack. An *escutcheon of pretence* bore the Queen's head *regardant*, while *quarterly, en surtout*, were: on the first, *gules*, three lions *passant, or*, for England; on the second, *or*, a lion *rampant* within a double *tressure flory counter flory, gules*, for Scotland; on the third, azure, a harp, *or*, stringed *argent*, for Ireland; on the fourth?—well!—why the fourth field should have been charged with specimens from a pack of cards, Alexander Blooker did not know. It was a blot on the *scutcheon*, no doubt; but two days had not sufficed for the printing of a special design, and this was the best he had been able to find. Besides, in a measure, it was true. There was no blinking the fact that even British civilisation was apt to bring gambling and drinking with it.

The next day the whole place was full up with native traders and natives generally. The first sight of them made Alexander Blooker wonder why they were so eager for piece goods, considering how little of them they wore!

But then he had hardly realised that beyond that northerly desert lay a huge tract of densely-populated, almost unknown land.

Trade was brisk over the way at Franz Braun's store. The cheap German muslins, guaranteed full length, and packed in convenient carriageable size, went off like smoke; and it was not until the best lots had gone off that a trader thought it worth while to give a perfunctory glance at Alexander Blooker's consignments. Then his eye fell instantly on the heraldic handkerchiefs.

"Sell, how much?" he asked.

Alexander Blooker shook his head. "They are not for sale, sir," he replied loftily. "They are a gift. An Imperial gift from Her Gracious Majesty the Queen of England. Everyone as buys forty yards of English stuff has one of them given in, free, gratis, and for nothin'. Him as buys two, has three, and so on—much the same as parcel post rates."

It took two interpreters to bring home this admixture of patriotism and progressive bribery to the limited brains of purchasers, but when it did find its way into their understanding, the effect was marvellous. Before the sun set Alexander Blooker had to conceal his last bale of handkerchiefs against the year which must elapse before he could get a new supply.

"So! *mein freund*," said Franz Braun, with a good-natured laugh. "It is well; but it is not trade!"

"It will be trade," replied little Alexander stoutly. "I am going to work this job on Imperial lines."

It grew to be a joke in this Distant Depot, as it had been in the City office where the yellow fog lay on the windows like cotton wool; but here Mr. Blooker had liberty to beat time to anything he chose. And it was surprising how the natives took to him. He must have spent a good deal of his fifty pounds on the purchase of medicines, for his morning dispensary soon out-rivalled Pastor Schmidt's—who, in truth, was growing a bit old for the work. He had lost his wife of late years, his daughter was betrothed to Franz Braun (who had a promise of a post elsewhere), and the hearts of all three held hope of change in the near

future which hindered much enthusiasm in the present. Not that there had ever been much of it in their lives; even the old missionary had gone on his way coolly, if conscientiously.

Alexander Blooker, on the contrary, was always at fever heat. He managed to transfer some of his ardour even through the lengthy mail to "Our Firm," so that when the river route reopened, a double consignment of dry goods took advantage of the water. The last penny, too, of the fifty pounds had gone, through Mr. Mossop's agency, in handkerchiefs of brand-new design, more heraldic, more patriotic than ever, and guiltless of cards. Perhaps Alexander Blooker felt that, so far as he was concerned, British civilisation was bringing no evil in its train.

And it was not. It was surprising, indeed, to see how the Distant Depot had improved in tone. Franz Braun, who, deprived by the difficulty of carriage of sufficient lager beer to satisfy him, had taken to over-much whisky instead, now, greatly to the delight of his "*verlobte*," satisfied his thirst on home-made ginger-pop, brewed by a recipe of Alexander's aunt, while the old pastor gave in with smiling acquiescence to the appropriation by Alexander Blooker of what might be called "parochial work." In fact, there was some talk of building another shanty as a parish hall; for the little man was distinctly churchy, and liked things in order. A Temperance League and a Band of Hope had, combined with an enlarged liver, made the liquor-store keeper take leave home, and Alexander, having offered to run the business until another man could come out, was now conducting it with a curious mixture of conscience and commerce.

So the eve of the next yearly market came round, and Alexander, in a fervour of Imperialism, actually climbed up the telegraph post which stood in one corner of his compound, and nailed a pocket-handkerchief to it, flag-wise.

"So!" called Franz Braun from over the way, half-jocularly, half-vexedly, "the patrol will at you haf damages when he returns."

For that single wire which sped seawards from north

to south was patrolled at intervals by a staff of engineers from the former.

"He has paid his last visit for the cool season," said Alexander knowingly; "so there it can stay if it likes for the next four months, at any rate."

"I wish that to me came the same certainty of liking," growled Franz Braun, "but, you see, the Herr papa ails, and the *verlobte* wishes him to the Homeland to take, and I would also go if I could."

A vague alarm showed on Alexander Blooker's face. "And leave me here alone? I'm glad you can't."

The idea, however, stuck in his brain. Supposing he were left alone, what would he do?

After he had arranged everything to his liking for the morrow, this idea of perfect solitude kept him from sleep and he strolled out with a pipe to quiet his nerves in the desert.

What would he do if he were left alone? A curious elation mixed with his natural dread. He walked, and walked, scarcely thinking out the question, only feeling it in that big heart of his. He had instinctively followed the telegraph line himself so as to be sure of not losing his way, but now he started at the sight of a solitary figure before him, visible in the moonlight, advancing to him, and keeping the same bee-line swiftly yet stumblingly, with a pause as for a few seconds' rest at each post. It was someone who was ill, or very, very tired.

A woman, a native woman! He could hear her voice now in her pauses. Always the same words mumbled mechanically over and over again:

"Save me, Queen-of-the-handkerchief. . . . Save me. . . ."

He knew enough of the language now to understand so much, and he waited, watching her curiously.

Across the last gap she stumbled towards him, gave one surprised look at him, and—with a vague effort at the same words as if he had been a telegraph post—sank down in a dead faint.

She was quite a slip of a girl, and, after a time, she came to herself; but she was so exhausted that it was past

grey dawn when Alexander Blooker managed to get her back to the telegraph post in the corner of his compound. And to this she clung pertinaciously, much to his annoyance, for he wanted to get her out of the way, and find who she was, and what she wanted, before the native traders began to turn up.

His remonstrances, however, were in vain. Her only reply was a murmured incoherent repetition of her first appeal:

"Save me! Queen-of-the-handkerchiefs."

And every time she said it, Alexander Blooker experienced a patriotic thrill down his back. He felt that she must at all costs be saved—but from what?

The dawn grew from grey to gold.

"*Gott in Himmel!*" laughed Franz Braun, coming down very early because of something he had forgotten. "*Mein Alexander mit a Madchen! Ach!* fie!"

"Stop your silly jaw and find out what she is wanting," cried Alexander Blooker fiercely, "or help me to get her into the shanty before the traders come."

"*Mein bruderlein*," replied Franz Braun solemnly, "when you have so long as me been in savage places you will-not-to-redress-women's-wrongs-learn."

Alexander Blooker swelled visibly. "That sentiment is made in Germany, sir. She has appealed to that"—he pointed to the flag pocket-handkerchief on the telegraph post which was waving in the breeze of dawn—"and, by George! she shall have protection!"

There was nothing more to be said, not even when some of the traders, coming on the scene, recognised the girl as the daughter of a powerful chief in the northern land, who would be certain to give trouble were she harboured by the Distant Depot. It would be better to send her back in their charge. How she had found her way so far was a mystery; she must have followed the telegraph posts day by day, have slept in their shadow night by night.

Some vague confused sense of the poetry of this—night after night sleeping, all unconsciously as it were, under the flag of England—day after day following the course of

light to freedom, rose in Alexander's throat, and half-choked him.

"She shall stay," he said. "Let her father come to fetch her; if he is in the right, he shall have her."

"My dear sir," quavered old Pastor Schmidt, "he will not time for explanation give. I was in a to-be-compared position once. I will not be so again. I will take my daughter-ling away. I will go. There is no good in staying to be massacred when pension has become due."

It was all to no purpose. Alexander Blooker stood firm. The utmost he would do was to write a conciliatory letter for the traders to give on their return to the girl's father, saying that his daughter had been handed over to the charge of a suitable matron, and that he might have her again if adequate explanations were tendered to Her Gracious Britannic Majesty's representative at the Distant Depot. And here the great temptation of his life came to Alexander Blooker. He would have loved to sign himself "Consul C.M.G." No one would be the wiser. But the sense of duty was strong within him, and he refrained.

This being so, Pastor Schmidt incontinently determined not to brave the certainty, as he deemed it, of coming trouble. His Society in the West was prepared for his possible return. The details of how the work could be carried on by a native deacon during the six months before a new pastor could arrive were all settled. Nothing but a half-conscious feeling that to retire would be to sign his warrant of dismissal from what had been to him his life, had kept him hitherto from decision. Now, the river was falling fast; they must take their chance of escape while they could get it.

And Franz Braun? After two days of moody helping to pack his "*verlobte's*" belongings, he came to say, not without a certain tremble in his voice:

"*Bruderlein*, I also go—so far anyhow—my firm said so much a month ago—to-night thou wilt be alone."

There was not much time for Alexander Blooker to realise his position until, as the cool of the night came on, he stood by the last little landing-stage on the river,

watching the Noah's-ark-boat as it punted its way slowly through the network of sandbanks.

Behind him as he stood, flared the red glories of the setting sun; in front of him, the long stretches of sand, the winding gleams of the shrinking river were fast losing each other in the purple-blue shadows of coming night. From the lessening speck of the boat as it drifted downwards on the current came half-regretful, half-joyful farewells. The native congregation, assembled in full force, sent after it wailing outcries; but Alexander Blooker was silent, save for one brief "Good-bye, Fraulein Anna! Good-bye, Pastor Schmidt! Good-bye, Franz Braun!"

The sliding shadow of the boat had disappeared into the oncoming night for his short-sighted eyes, long before the still savage congregation lost it, but he stood staring on where it had been long after they had gone home contentedly. Then he turned suddenly. The red had almost faded from the sky. Only low down on the horizon lay a band of what Ruskin held to be the highest light—pure vermilion—and against it he could see the telegraph post, with a black speck that must be the pocket-handkerchief of England flying at its peak.

He drew a long breath. For the first time in his life Alexander Blooker felt that he was not a slave.

* * * * *

Six months after, the first *doongah* of the season punted and sailed up the river again. The Distant Depot was deserted; but there was no sign of disorder in it. The English flag still flew from the telegraph post. The Pastor's house, which Alexander Blooker had been implored to occupy and keep in order, looked, save for the dust which always gathered from the desert, as if he must have been there but a few days before. The garden was ablaze with flowers. The clusters of native huts had disappeared, and in their place neat streets of low wattle and dab dwellings converged outwards from quite an imposing edifice with "Church Hall" marked on it conspicuously. The liquor shop had disappeared. Franz Braun's dry goods store was

closed and the British one removed to a portion of the central building.

The little Mission Chapel also was utterly changed. The seats removed to make room for clean matting on which the native congregation could squat. Everything western or of western symbolism swept away, and in their place, ingeniously adapted to their present purpose, were things held sacred by the natives. Here an English school had evidently had its quarters, for copybooks, headed in a neat hand "If you take an inch, you may as well take an ell," were found there. Also a few chapters of the New Testament written out in the same handwriting.

The tiny cemetery behind the chapel, surrounded on three sides by banana thickets, remained unaltered, save that, just under the east window, three of the heraldic pocket-handkerchiefs were pegged to the ground in an oblong.

What had happened?

The yearly market day brought vague, inconsistent rumours from the mouths of many merchants.

Nothing was known for certain. The "Lord-of-Handkerchiefs" had remained, of course. It was said that the chief had come for his daughter. Nothing had happened. Only the Handkerchief-Lord had, as they might see, built palaces.

He was a Great Chief. The people simply would not live without him when he died. So, at least, they had said as they came through the villages beyond the desert on their way north. How long ago? Ah! not long; they were afraid, see you, of the new gentlemen. They preferred to begin afresh elsewhere. That would doubtless be his grave at the back of the chapel. He was a great loss to the country. No one gave handkerchiefs away as he did.

So the Distant Depot had to go on its way without further details. Only the traces of Alexander Blooker's short rule remained, and the new inhabitants who soon gathered to fill the trim walls and dab houses benefited by them.

One day, however, when almost a year had gone by, the new pastor found that the oblong of handkerchiefs in the

cemetery, instead of being worn and faded by sun and rain was, apparently, brand new.

Someone must have renewed it in the night. And on the top of it, written out in wobbly round hand, was the last copy Alexander Blooker had set:

"If you take an inch you may as well take an ell."

From which the Distant Depot inferred that it was his death-day.

THE REGENERATION OF DAISY BELL

"It is quite out of the question," said the Adjutant, severely. "Major Primmer has formerly complained, and the C.O. has desired me to—to—to see that the nuisance is abated——"

So far, regimental discipline kept the Adjutant's risible muscles under control; then he smiled, for he was more human than adjutants are wont to be in orderly room. "And, upon my soul, youngster," he went on, picking up a letter which lay beside him, "it is a bit hard on Primmer. I can imagine his disgust! H'm, h'm—'*have to report*'—Ah! here—'*As usual, I woke with the entry of my body-servant bringing my early tea. As usual, also, I lay for a few moments to collect my thoughts; but when I turned to pour out the beverage*'—good old Primmer—'*my disgust was great to find Lieutenant Graham's so-called tame monkey—I may interpolate that it is a specimen of the Presbytis schistaceus, a bold and predatory tribe, and not the Presbytis entellus, a much milder race*'—good old Primmer again; he's nothing if not exact—'*in full possession of my tea-table. The brute had consumed all the toast, save one crust, which I regret to say it threw at me when I attempted remonstrance.*'"

We both laughed.

"Can't you see Major Primmer, V.C., sitting up in bed with his eye-glasses on, in a mortal funk," I began, trying to brazen it out. But official decorum had resumed its sway over the Adjutant, and he read on:

"'*It then proceeded, with an accuracy which I cannot believe to be entirely self-taught*'—H'm, Graham, that is serious; remember he is your superior officer—'*to imitate closely my method of pouring out tea. This is peculiar, as I invariably put the milk in first. My efforts at checking the lawless brute were again quite unavailing; and resulted only in the deliberate emptying of the scalding hot tea over my nether garments.*'"

"Why couldn't he say his pyjamas," I groaned, cap-

tiously; for I recognised that things had gone a bit too far. I had had no idea Jennie had such a fund of humour.

But once more official decorum failed to respond.

"'*This, I may add, it did again and again, until the teapot was exhausted. It then pouched the whole contents of the sugar-basin, drank the milk, and smeared its head with the butter. The latter action appeared to arouse reminiscence. It repaired to my dressing-table, brushed its hair with my brushes, used my pommade hongroise, and then proceeding to the wash-hand-stand, nefariously laid hold of my tooth-brush. This, however, was too much. I rose. At the same moment my body-servant providently appeared with my hot water, and the brute, jabbering at me in unseemly fashion, made for the window, which I always keep open winter and summer. I have already requested Lieutenant Graham to remove this savage animal; and now have no option . . .*'"

The Adjutant laid down the letter. "It's hard on Primmer," he said, with almost superhuman solemnity; "the tooth-brush incident was——" he resumed speech after a brief pause, "and he is a good sort is old Primmer."

I was perfectly aware of the fact. Only the week before, when we were out in the jungle, he had dosed me with quinine and taken my temperature every two hours during an attack of fever and ague.

So Jennie the monkey must give way; but what the deuce was I to do with her? I did not want to have to shoot her.

"Give her to Tootsie," suggested the Adjutant, sympathetically; "I heard her say not long ago she would give anything for a monkey."

It was a brilliant idea. Miss d'Aguilar, familiarly known as Tootsie, performed the arduous duties of spinster to our little frontier station; so that afternoon, before going on duty, I rode round by "The Forest," so called, I presume, because there was not a bit of vegetation larger than a caper bush between it and the Beluchistan Hills.

I found the young lady and her mother—a frankly black-and-tan lady who looked as if she would have been more comfortable with a veil to roll round her fat person—engaged, after their wont, in entertaining some of the

junior subalterns at tea. As I entered, Tootsie—a sparkling brunette with gloriously startling Titian brown hair, due to cunning applications of henna dye (there were traces of it on Mamma's hands)—was, in a high-pitched staccato voice, recounting with arch gaiety, her impressions of Calcutta, whence she had but lately returned. "Yes! I do declare the men are just sillies. Why! do not believe me, but I asked a young fellow in a Europe shop to bring me flesh-coloured stockings, and he brought me tan! Was he not a silly boy?"

The pause which inevitably followed this anecdote seemed a fitting opportunity for somewhat sentimentally offering Jennie. Had I offered a bomb the effect could not have been more disastrous. Miss grew crimson; Mamma, purple and plethoric, wondered how any gentleman could keep such a nasty brute, still less offer it as a fit companion to an innocent young girl.

Evidently Jennie had again got herself disliked; how, the junior sub. told me succinctly as we rode home.

"You see, Tootsie dyes her hair—and henna's a bit of a lengthy business. They don't mind me, I'm only a boy; but she has to have it plastered over her head for hours. So she has a big hat with a false bun and fringe for these occasions. And Jennie got hold of it somehow last week. I happened to be there; and, by George, I chevied the beast half over cantonments before she would give it up—she's a regular devil."

I sighed. Evidently the culprit must be shot. She had no friends.

As I came up to the guardroom, however, I heard a song being lilted out by a tenor voice into the hot dusty air. The refrain of London sounded odd here in the desert on the confines of civilisation:

> "Dy'sy, Dy'sy, give me yer answer dew,
> I'm half cry'sy, all for the love o' yew."

"Yes, sir," reported the sergeant. "It's Dy'sy, sure enough. He's in agin; more often in nor out."

"What for?" I asked, a trifle regretfully, for the man, nicknamed by his comrades Dy'sy from his habit of

perpetually warbling that aggravating ditty, was rather a favourite of mine. He was a perfectly reckless rolling stone, a bad shilling of about five-and-thirty, who from the way he had, when not on his guard, of assimilating drill, must have been through it several times. But over his past he drew a veil; and, indeed, his present was sufficient for character. He had come out with a draft in the cold weather, and already his evil influence with the recruits was notorious. Yet I liked the fellow; he was a first-class light-weight bruiser, out and away the best in the regiment. I had taken lessons of his, and his devil-may-care defiance had been attractive.

"Same as before, sir," replied the sergeant. "Shindy in Number Three. 'Tain't no manner o' use shiftin' 'is room. He'd purwurt a Sunday School."

Solid truth in every word! Yet the light blue eyes which met mine had a twinkle in them that softened my heart.

"If you are such a cursed fool," I said, as sternly as I could, "you'll come to grief."

His face took on sublime innocence. "Beg pardin, sir; but it ralely ain't fair w'en a party is trying to do 'is dooty to 'is parsters an' marsters. Them young chaps was makin' fun hover your monkey usin' the major's py-jammas has a slopper; an' I only tole 'm it was kind o' disrespekful like, as she meant it hall in k'yindness, an' bid 'm hold their jaw. That's how the tin dishes got hinjured, for," he added, with great dignity, "I won't 'ave no slanderin' o' dumb animals as can't speak up for thesselves."

A gleam of hope shot through me. "You're fond of animals, are you?" I asked.

For once candid confidence came to him. "Well! I don' know, sir," he replied, "but 'twas the loss o' a dorg as fust set me wrong." He gave a glance towards the sergeant, who was discreetly retiring, and then went on. "I was but a young chap, just gone twenty, and the dorg was a bull tarrier, sir, as good as they make 'm. S'yme n'yme as your monkey, sir—Jennie. We was chums. Then I got a gel, one o' the yaller-haired kind, sir, an' I was a

fool about her, as young chaps is apt ter be. Well, sir, I 'adn't bin just steddy—no real 'arm, you know, but sort o' light like. But I settles down an' begins ter screw against gettin' married. The yaller-haired gel was livin' with me, sir, so as to save time like, but we was sure to get married in church an' go hoff emigrating so soon as I'd got the 'oof. An' Jennie was to go, too, for she an' me was chums. Well, sir, there was a big, black chap, coster he was, I licked him more nor once for 'angin' round; but there! females are built that way. So it 'appened when I come 'ome one hevening that I found 'er gone, an' the 'oof too. An' Jennie——" he drew his hand slowly over his mouth—"Jennie had died game, sir. She 'ad a bit of the big black brute's corduroys betwixt 'er teeth, but 'e'd bashed 'er 'ead open with 'is boot."

There was silence. Then he went on with a reckless laugh, "'Tweren't the gel, sir; there's plenty o' them ter be got, yaller hair an' all. But Jennie an' me had been chums."

Five minutes later the monkey had changed masters. To oblige me and save Jennie from being shot Dy'sy Bell had promised to take care of her.

"I'u'd rather 'ave no money, sir," he said, when he appeared to fetch her away and I offered him something towards her keep, "'twould only go to the canteen, and if I get into trouble, oo'd look after 'er?"

"'Er," I may mention, had just bitten his finger through to the bone, an action which he dismissed with the remark that "females was built that way."

Three days later, as I rode past Number Three barrack, I saw Jennie cracking nuts on a brand-new perch. Dy'sy, it now appeared, was quite a smart carpenter, and had made it himself in the workshop. Three days after that again, the perch was embellished by a brass chain, and Dy'sy admitted shamefacedly that he had once been in a foundry. So time passed on, until it occurred to me that Dy'sy had ceased to come into prominence before me as company officer, and I questioned the sergeant concerning him.

The official did not move a muscle. "Number Three's

has quiet has a orphin asylum now, sir. As I lies in my bunk I don't 'ear no whisper. But it was Bedlam broke loose the fust night after Jennie come, sir. I lay low, seeing as there never was no use in tryin' to get at the bottom o' that sort o' row in the dark, sir. An' next morning 'arf the room complained of 'avin' a hunbaptised brute put to bed with 'em. The monkey slep' with Dy'sy, sir, so I spoke to 'im, an' told 'im I c'u'dn't 'ave no more complaints, an' he replied, quite civil-like, as there sh'u'dn't be none. An' there wasn't; but 'arf the men 'ad black eyes that week, sir, though 'ow they came by 'm they didn't say."

I did not enquire. It was sufficient for me that Number Three barrack was rapidly becoming regenerate. As I passed one day I heard a voice say, "Now, boys! I won't 'ave no cuss words; they ain't fit for a lydy to hear."

"You don't go so often to the canteen as you used to, Bell," I said to him one day when I found him sitting alone in the verandah nursing Jennie, who jibbered at me.

"Ain't got the money, sir," he replied cheerfully. "*Neringis* and sich-like is a horful price in this Gord-forsaken spot, an' Jennie's been a bit ailin'; won't eat nothing else."

"Well, you'll be getting your stripes soon, I expect, if you go on as you are doing," I remarked.

He flushed up. "I 'opes so, sir," he said modestly. "Jennie 'u'd set store by a striped sleeve, females being built that way."

My prophecy proved correct. Dy'sy was made a corporal, and before long, in the Border campaign which the cold weather brought us, found himself a sergeant, and so eventually in charge of a telegraph station on the top of one of the passes to our rear.

It was an important post to keep open, since on the integrity of the wire through a mile or so of singularly difficult country hung the certainty of speedy relief, should any kind of disaster overtake our little force, which was intimidating the tribes in the valleys beyond.

And disaster did overtake it, chiefly by reason of a terrific snowstorm which swept over it early in February—

a snowstorm which paralysed progress, and made all thoughts turn to the probability of that mile of telegraph wire remaining intact.

No supplies could, of course, be sent up, so the men in the station must either starve or return, if, indeed, they had not been overwhelmed already. The latter seemed the most likely, since, though the through wire remained open, not a signal came from the station.

"An avalanche most likely," said the Adjutant. "The station was built, I always said, in the wrong place. What luck the wire isn't damaged as yet. It won't be long before it is, I'm afraid."

It was, however, still going strong when four men, one badly frost-bitten, made their way into camp. They had started five, they said, by Sergeant Bell's orders, after they had with difficulty extricated themselves from the ruins of the house, which had been completely smashed up by a tremendous avalanche. It was impossible, Dy'sy had said, to keep the post and six men also, so he had given them what supplies he could spare—the store was luckily uninjured—and bidden them take their best chance of safety at once.

As for his, it seemed but slender, as I felt when, a fortnight later, we managed to cut our way through the drifts that lay round the hollow where the station had stood. Across this hollow the through wire still stretched, and quite recently someone had evidently been at work upon it, for tools lay on fresh frosted snow. But all was still as the dead, quiet as the grave. We found Dy'sy lying on his face in the store many feet below the snow surface. The steps cut down to it were worn with the passing of his feet, but he did not move when we bent over him; something, however, cuddled close in his arms, woke and jibbered at us angrily. It was Jennie, dressed for warmth in every rag of blanketing available. She was as fat as a pig, and the charcoal embers in the tin can hung round her neck were not yet quite cold. But Dy'sy was skin and bone; yet the Irish doctor, as he bent hastily to examine him, said, cheerfully: "Annyhow, his

love for the baste may have saved his life; she's kept his heart warm whatever."

And she had.

Six weeks afterwards I sat beside him in hospital. He showed thin and gaunt still in his grey flannel dressing-gown, and two fingers were missing on his left hand.

"Well!" I said, "so they've given you the D.S.M., and a special pension if you want to go."

He smiled brilliantly.

"Don't want to, sir. Jennie she likes the H'army; females is built that way. And as for t'other, 'twas really Jennie done it. I couldn't take her through the snow—she'd 'a' died for sure. An' I couldn't leave her, so there wasn't no choice."

A SONG WITHOUT WORDS

It was in the club that the telegram came, and as I sat watching my partner make pie of one of the best bridge hands ever ruined, I read it over once or twice, and, finally, when our adversaries had run out, handed it over to the culprit as a means of turning my wrath to another subject.

"Transferred!" he commented, calmly. "H'm! We shall have to get Beveridge to join our game instead!" (My self-pity flew for a moment to poor Beveridge, and I wondered what sort of a temper he had.) "Still, it isn't a bad place, though rather out of the way. Splendid buck-shooting—only, of course, this isn't the time. And a very decent house." Here he giggled. "Well, decent isn't, perhaps, the word to use, is it? And, by Jove, I'm sorry for you. There will be a devil of a mess to set right, I expect; and, anyhow, it isn't pleasant to step into another fellow's shoes after that sort of thing."

I acquiesced. "That sort of thing" was, briefly, the suicide of a fellow civil servant, whom I had known vaguely as the most brilliant man in my year.

A tall, handsome, light-hearted fellow, full of life, full of everything, apparently, likely to make him go up; instead of which he had gone down steadily—so steadily that at last even a Government which prides itself on ignoring breaches of social law, had been driven into first banishing him to the charge of a solitary jungle district, where there was no world to be scandalised, and then with warning him that he must either pull up or send in his papers.

He chose the latter course decisively, sending in his checks to another tribunal.

"He wasn't a bad sort when he first came out," con-

tinued my partner; "had, in fact, distinct glimmerings of sense, and to the last he wasn't, so to speak, a bad officer. But the wine and the women—well, there you are—and—make the best of it."

This last might have been meant for the nice hand which he displayed. We had cut for partners again, with the only result of shifting the deal. I took it that way, anyhow, and said no more.

There was, in fact, nothing to be said, so when I got home, I told the bearer of my transfer, and, sitting down, wrote an effusively-cheerful letter to my wife, who was in the hills with the babies, enlarging on the manifold advantages of my transfer, and making much of the fact that, though it brought no extra pay, it was, in a measure, promotion.

Then I smoked a pipe, feeling virtuous, for those two estimable creatures—my bearer and my wife—invariably do my duty for me. In fact, I am the happiest man in existence. I have told my wife so a hundred times, and she believes it firmly. The faculty, by the way, which good women have of believing things that ought to be true, is occasionally appalling, but is always immensely convenient to their husbands.

I always wrote her cheerful letters, and in return I used to get delightful daily budgets, giving me all the wonderful ways and works of the chicks, and imploring me to let her know regularly what the cook gave me for dinner, and if I ate it. Also if I were morally sure that the water was boiling for my tea every afternoon, as, if I was not, she would infallibly hand the babies over to hirelings, and come down to her ill-used hubby.

Such delightful, tender, womanly budgets were her replies that I swear and declare that, had I been asked to read them aloud, a lump in my throat would have interfered with my elocution.

Yet I swear and declare, also, that I would far rather the kettle were not boiling than that any one I cared for should fuss over it and a charcoal brazier on a hot verandah on a sweltering August day. But, then, as my wife is always telling me, I have no real sense of duty.

I wrote her, therefore, as cheerfully as I could, telling her, which was true, that solitude would be better than bad bridge. Also that it really was a move nearer to her, since, in case of emergency, I could cut across country by dhoolie to the foot of the hills. Finally, I enlarged on the fact that my successor would take over our house as it stood until her return, so that she need not fuss about moving anything, as I should do well in my new house, which was to remain as it was until my predecessor's unfortunate affairs had gone through the Administrator-General's office—a business, as a rule, of months.

I even mentioned the existence of a Bechstein grand piano, with a hint that if I could get rid of our cottage, I might buy it when the sale came on—an additional craftiness, since my wife loves to think I am allowed to have my own way in everything. It makes her more certain that we have won the Dunmow flitch of bacon—which we undoubtedly have.

Having done my best to set her wifely anxiety at rest, I advanced fifty rupees to my bearer.

In consequence of which we started next day for my new district, bag and baggage. Though the most part of the journey was by train, the bearer insisted on buckling a big sword he had picked up somewhere round his capacious middle. It decidedly had an effect on the railway coolies.

About three a.m. we turned out at a roadside station, where, thanks to that fifty rupees, a dak gharri was waiting to convey me the remaining twenty miles. I was very sleepy, and as I tumbled into my new conveyance I got a vague impression of a howling wilderness of sand, tufted with tiger grass, desolate utterly; so falling asleep again, and not waking until, in the darkness, I tumbled out—this time into a large empty room, with a tiny camp bed set in its midst—I carried on, as it were, the impression of desert surrounding me. But not for long. The next day would, I suspected, be a trifle trying, since my unfortunate predecessor's methods of business would scarcely be conducive to a mechanical taking over charge of his office. So I was soon asleep, without even realising that

probably I was sleeping where he had lain dead but a day or two before.

When I opened my eyes next morning I felt a curious content and surprise. The room was bare in the extreme. The camp bed on which I lay, a deck chair, the cover of a travelling chest-of-drawers doing duty as a wardrobe, the top of a travelling bath doing ditto as a table, a bit of looking-glass hung above it by a string—these were its furniture. The furniture of the light-hearted boy who had come out in the same year as I had. With an odd, guilty remorse, I remembered that I had long since exchanged these simple satisfactions of youth for more luxurious methods. An unpaid bill of Maple's, indeed, flashed to my mind, as, looking round the walls, which were hung with full-sized photographs and copies of the great masters, I realised that my predecessor had spent his spare cash in a different fashion to what I had.

Very different, indeed. My remorse vanished in contempt, as, opening one of the drawers, a very strong scent of sandal wood made itself perceptible, and in one corner I saw a trumpery piece of native jewellery.

A certain anger took possession of me then, as I looked up into the eyes of the Sistine Madonna, which hung in a conspicuous place, and I felt virtuous in realising that, after all, it was a natural refinement and pure love of order and beauty which lay at the bottom of our civilised cult of comfortableness.

So thinking, I passed out on to the verandah, still with last night's impression on me that I was in a howling desert.

What I saw, therefore, gave me a shock. For here was a garden such as I had never seen. Neither English nor Indian, yet reminiscent of both in its wide sweeps of well-kept lawns, its dense thickets of flowering shrubs, both, at this break in the rainy season, looking their best. It took me a moment, however, to realise what it was which gave this garden its curious distinction from other gardens. There was no path in it. Though where I stood must once have been the front door, since a huge pillared porch jutted beyond the verandah, the grass swept right

up to the very house. It had a curious untrodden look. A huge-leaved, waxen-flowered Beaumontia almost covered the porch with its cold, white scentless blossoms, and between the pillars Eucharis lilies rose above a marvellous mass of maidenhair.

The delicate greenery, the chill whiteness made me think involuntarily of the newly dead, and had I had on my hat I felt as if I should have removed it.

As it was, I stepped, with a slight shiver, beyond the porch into the sunlight.

The chilliness was gone in a moment, though the cloistered air remained, due to the great tamarind trees, which on all sides shut out the world, shut in the flowers. The birds, too. I never saw so many. A golden oriole was challenging the sun with its full-throated call from the bronze rain-shoots of the huge banyan tree, which filled up one corner, and there were at least a dozen ruby-throated humming-birds among the hibiscus flowers—those strangely mutable flowers, white in the dawn, which blush into a crimson death before sunset.

The banyan tree, promising a well in its shade, and the well promising the possibility of a gardener whom I could question—for I was beset by curiosity—I strolled over to it, and found what I wanted—a very old, wizened man, pretending to weed an offensive patch of yellow African marigolds, which was carefully hidden away behind a henna hedge.

"Yes!" he replied, with the tearless regret one often hears in native voices, the dead Huzoor had been very fond of his garden—in a way. (Here the regret became personal and aggrieved.) He had never sent for European seeds, so, of course, it had been impossible even for the most skilful of malas to make it into a real garden. But if the new Huzoor would employ this slave—who had many certificates—here the usual bundle was drawn out from some mysterious hiding-place—mysterious because he was more than half-naked—he would make proper paths and "rippin' beds," and set them ablaze with "floccus" and "soot-ullians" and "gerabians and——"

He was beginning to reel off a seedsman's catalogue

when I pulled him up by pointing to the marigolds. He pursed up his lips in pious horror. Oh, no, there would be no more "gooljafari" or "genda" grown in that garden. They had been for the other folk, who, of course, would no longer—— The mixture of cunning question and scandalised propriety on the old humbug's face made me mentally resolve that he should "no longer" either. In fact, before my wife and the bairns came down I must have the whole place cleared and fumigated. But the garden? No, it must not be touched.

I had my breakfast in a huge dark, central room, which was absolutely bare save for a ricketty table and two chairs. There were not even any photographs on the walls. It was so dark that they could not have been seen.

"They found the Huzoor lying there, at the door," said my bearer calmly, after apologising profusely for an oversight in the matter of marmalade, which, he trusted, might be forgotten, and not reported to the memsahib. "He had been dead a long time, for he had paid off all the servants and sent away the other people and the children on the evening before, saying he was going on a journey. His bearer waited for him at the station with his baggate, only he never came, nor his horse, either.

"It was the office which found him, when it came for signature of papers next day, and there was nothing disturbed, only the Huzoor lying where they could see him easily from the front door, and the horse comfortable in its stall, with plenty of grass. He was always thoughtful to the poor was the sahib, and never gave trouble to others. At least, so his servants say—but what can they know—poor, mean creatures, who do not even know when a kettle boils!"

I let him talk, for somehow I did not wish to think. In much the same mood I went doggedly through my day's work in taking over charge and reducing chaos to order—or, rather, conventional order, for through all the disgraceful neglect of ordinary routine ran the unmistakable thread of one man's control, and of a strong man at that, even in its favouritism, its flagrant derelictions from the ordinary conception of a magistrate's duty.

As I got into my dogcart to come home, an orderly came forward, with a doubtful air, carrying a small bag, such as natives use as a purse.

"It was the custom," he began; but by this time I felt that I must return to a right judgment of things, so I purposely lost my temper, and let it be known that all old customs were to be abolished. "It was only the pennies for the children on Fridays," stuttered the orderly. "The Huzoor used always to give them——"

I drove off, thinking that, perhaps, my predecessor might have been wise in choosing a higher tribunal.

My bearer, however, who, as usual, stood in the verandah to receive my hat, had no doubts in the totality of his blame. He was full of virtuous activities. Order, in some measure, had been restored. Certain screens of grass, which had been removed against a time when the mem might find them useful in the poultry yard, and the outhouses having been finally cleared—by the aid of the police—of various pensioners and idle folk, who wept profusely, had been duly distributed among the servants, he himself having taken one with a women's enclosure, which would be the cause of great comfort.

I bid him take what he liked, and for the first time went into the drawing-room, where he said my tea awaited me.

I shall never forget my first look at that room, with its five straight, undraped windows, set in a row round one slightly curved wall. The others bare, save for the shadows, which were fast creeping to obliterate even the bareness. The windows were mere oblongs of dim light, stretching up into the lofty roof, and that shadow looming in one shadowy corner, across a vast expanse of shadowy matting, must be the Bechstein piano. I made a move towards it, and stumbled against my own tea-table, a highly ornate, sham Oriental, carved thing, which the bearer, by my wife's orders, carried about with him religiously, and at the same time the bearer himself entered with the reading lamp, without which, so I am told, I cannot exist.

I gave up the Bechstein, therefore, for a time, and had caviare sandwiches with my tea instead.

I do not know why—my wife would have said because the water was not boiling—but I did not enjoy my tea. The pity of all things in this incomprehensible world struck me with a vague anger. I sat wondering if, after all, a higher tribunal——

Good heavens! What was that? Someone was playing on the Bechstein. I did not turn. I sat staring at those five solemn oblongs of the glimmering windows, showing lighter and lighter as the shadows deepened in the big bare room.

It was Walther's song out of "Tannhauser"—the song of divine love. . . .

The bearer said I was asleep when he came to tell me it was time to dress for dinner. Perhaps I was, for sound sleep brings perfect peace and rest, and that had come to me with the music which had come out of the windows.

I have a dim recollection that the khansaman apologised because the soup was not clear, and that the bearer explained that a wire mattress had not arrived owing to the breaking down of a bullock cart. But I know that I sat up till all hours of the night in the dark, hoping to hear the Bechstein again, but it was silent as the grave.

Perhaps at dusk I might hear it once more. I raced off to the office early, in order to be home in time, and was almost glad of a few flagrant derelictions of duty cropping up to keep my moral nature from too much sympathy.

Yet even so, as I drove home, I put my hand in my pocket and drew out a handful of coppers for a group of children I passed on the road. I could not help it when I remembered a certain paper I had sent up to the Administrator-General that day, showing the way in which a certain sinner had spent his last pay.

"Tea is ready in the drawing-room," said the bearer; and even in my preoccupation I thought there was something odd in his voice.

But a look into the big bare room was sufficient. I shouldn't have known it, women have such a way of altering the whole character of a house by a yellow silk bow. She had taken the little camp bed and made a couch

out of it with cushions and phulkarees. The five fateful windows, like the five senses looking out on the garden of the soul, were tucked and festooned, and through one of them came the familiar sound of a pair of bellows, and then a still more familiar exclamation:

"There! That's really boiling at last."

The next instant my wife was in my arms, tearful, tender, triumphant.

Cheerful letters were all very well, but she knew; so she had just left the babies in charge of some super-excellent creature, and run away down to see I was really comfortable.

"And, after all," she said, nodding her head as she poured out the tea, "it is as well I did come, for really there seems to be nothing in the house except the Bechstein."

I looked over to it dully, and noticed that it was now ornamented by my photograph in a filigree frame.

"Yes," I said—I hope I kept some of the regret out of my voice—"only the Bechstein."

And as we sat and talked of the children, and our own happiness, and the seeds we were going to sow in the garden, the five windows grew lighter as the shadows deepened.

But the spirit of the room was silent.

SEGREGATION

"I've got the plague, sir, upon my sam, I 'ave. I'll show yer the spot, sir, same as they 'ad in 1666 w'en the Tower o' London was burnt down, an' Sir Christopher Wren built St. Paul's—so 'elp me Gawd."

The speaker was a plausible loafer of the usual type. He was dressed in white, or what had once been white raiment. A gilt button or two hung round the coat; mute testimony to its having once belonged to a man who did some work of some kind for the Government. He was not a Eurasian, that you could see by the line of white on his forehead above the tan, as he stood apologetically in the court room holding his helmet before him with both hands as if he meant to offer it up as a bribe. It was certainly the most valuable thing about him, for it had a wadded quilted cover and looked, what the rest of him did not—respectable.

"The plague!" echoed the magistrate (I am the magistrate). "Nonsense, man! you're drunk—that's what's the matter with you. Inspector, remove that man: put him into the lock-up if he gives trouble."

The inspector approached, but the loafer stood his ground, not without quiet dignity; the dignity that comes to some people in the first stage of intoxication. "Excuse of me, sir," he said, "but I ain't going to make myself a noosance to nobody. That's w'y I came 'ere. That's w'y I spent my last bloomin' *hart hanner* (eight annas) in takin' a *ticca ghari* (hired carriage) to the 'orspitals, every one of 'em, so as there might be no infections. Bless your 'art, I don't want to do no 'arm to anyone. I wants to be seggergated, that's all, afore I does any."

The magistrate smiled faintly: there was something likeable in the man's face.

"So you've been to the hospitals, have you? What did the doctors say?"

"Same as you, sir," he replied cheerfully, "as I was drunk; but if I am, Job Charnock—that's me, sir—never got real on afore with one glass o' *harrack*—an' beastly bad stuff it was, too—smelt like a dead dorg an' tasted like a tannery."

Perhaps the name, Job Charnock, awoke memories of the founder of Calcutta, who, before his fortunes were made, must have been more or less of a friendless wanderer in an eastern land; perhaps it was because the magistrate was waiting for a file to be brought from the record office; but the spirit of cross-examination entered into him. "One glass of *arrak*—is that all you've had?"

The loafer paused, an expression of the utmost candour came to his face. "All I've 'ad to-day, sir, s'elp me, 'cos I 'adn't a pice more left ter buy a bit o' food with. Only the *hart hanner* I spent Christian-like on a *ticca ghari* ter try an' get seggergated afore it was too late. An' they said I was drunk!"

The mournful cadence of his voice was irresistible.

"Chaprassi, take that man to the serai, and tell the *darogah* to give him some breakfast. I'll pay for it. Now you go quietly, my man, and sleep it off. You'll have got rid of the plague by morning."

The file had come in from the record office, I was immersed in the endless, hopeless attempt to drag truth from the bottom of the well in a land suit; so I thought no more of Job Charnock until I met the civil surgeon at tennis in the evening.

"Yes," he replied to my query, "Segregation was on his rounds again this morning. You're new, but he is a regular institution here. He gets the funks on board, generally about a month after a bout, and comes to every one of us in turn to be segregated. I think he is a bit looney on the plague—has a real *phoby* about it. He'll get it, I expect, some day, from sheer fright—but there's none about at present."

The something likeable in the man's face, however, returned to memory with the obvious fact that he had appeared chiefly concerned to "do no 'arm to anyone." So the next morning, having ten minutes to spare on my

way from the city, I called in at the *serai*. It was like all other *serais*: a dreary cloistered square, deserted absolutely between five a.m. until eight p.m.; that is to say, the hours during which travellers are on the road. Now, close on nine o'clock, only the muck of last night's bivouac remained. A sweeper, with a broom and a basket, was busy removing some of the more salient rubbishes. Otherwise all was still as the grave. But, seated on a rush stool in one of the little octagonal turret rooms, which, built on either side of the gateway, are reserved for European wayfarers, I found Job Charnock. He had evidently paid a visit to the well, for he looked cleaner and was distinctly sober, but he was more voluble than ever.

"I give 'arf the breakfast you stood me away to the sweeper, sir," he said, "an' 'e brought me some *omum* water as cured me in a jiffy. That's all I was wantin', sir, an' none o' them doctors could spare me 'arf a pint. It seems strange, don't it, sir? And ter think the 'arm as I might do going about with the plague spot under my harm, as it's all writ truthful in that book by Mr. 'Arrison Hainsworth, Esquire. 'Ave you read it, sir?" he asked blandly.

I assured him I had, told him he was a fool, advised him to go north to the new railway to find work, gave him five rupees to find his way there. It was indiscreet and quite contrary to the rules of the Charity Organisation Society, but as I have said, something in the man's face appealed to me.

Thereafter he passed from my memory under the usual pressure of work and worry which is the lot of an Indian official.

It was in the middle of the hot weather, when the civil surgeon rushed into me at my office with a telegram in his hand.

"Will you arrange with Spiller for my work," he said excitedly, "I must be off at once. Read that—you see, I gave the assistant surgeon at the Bimariwallah dispensary a few days' leave off my own bat, and there's only a dresser in charge; so there will be the devil of a row if anything goes wrong."

The telegram read as follows: "Outbreaks of much plague amongst European gentlemen here. Please arrange for supplies of sufficient brandy."

"But there are no Europeans at Bimariwallah," I began.

"I know that," broke in the doctor, "and, of course, brandy isn't the right treatment; but that's just where it is The fool of a dresser doesn't know English, doesn't know anything, so I'm bound to go."

"Well, if you'll curb your impatience for two hours, till I've finished this case, I'll motor you so far down the Trunk road, and *dak* you on. I have an Executive Municipal Council to-morrow morning at Raipur, and it's all on the way."

There had been a shower of rain—an advance scout of the coming monsoon to spy out the dryness of the land—so our spin of thirty miles down the road was pleasant enough, though the great wains of corn and straw that still defy the network of railways which has immeshed India, had possession of a large portion of the highway. But, to my mind, there is always something "satisfactory" in finding that no amount of preliminary hooting changes the path of the slow-moving wheels, and that, in the end, even a Siddeley-Wolsey car must either hold up until comprehension comes to the carter who moves as slowly as the wheels, or else pass by on a side-walking. It seems to presage safety; to give assurance that India will not, after all, run off the rails.

The buggy and horse were waiting at the cross roads, and it only needed a *detour* of three miles to drop the doctor at the very door of the dispensary.

Feeling some curiosity as to what was really the matter, I withstood his prayer to be set down and allowed to make his way on foot. I was glad I did; for the first glimpse I had of the dispensary compound assured me that something very unusual was taking place. To begin with, a long low reed shed, such as is used in cholera epidemics, had been hastily run up on the opposite side of the road, and in it were to be seen patients lying in their beds or out of them. Posts, each carrying a yellow streamer, were

set up every ten yards around the compound itself, and at each gate stood a village watchman complete with speared staff and bells.

As we drove up, the dresser—pallid of face, but full of a vast importance—rushed out from a small hut which had been erected inside.

"Many, many thanks to Supreme Almighty," he ejaculated; then added, with distinct complacency, "you will find all things necessarily in order, sir. Segregationalism is being much carried out. Patient having passed through p-neumonic deliriums is now comatic and in *articulo mortis.*"

I followed the doctor, who looked, as well he might, completely bewildered.

The dispensary was cleared out: saucers of disinfectants positively littered the ground. White sheets saturated with the same hung at every door; the smell of them stank in the nostrils, and, as I followed, a dank disagreeable wet flap from one of them on my cheek made me shiver; but the sight which met my eyes in the central room set me literally shaking with laughter. It was so inexpressibly comic.

Propped high on pillows, his face placid, composed, lay Job Charnock, snoring contentedly, while an empty brandy bottle beside him on the bed showed one cause at least of his somnolence. There he lay, peaceful as a baby, while the doctor, frowning at my inopportune laughter, turned angrily to the dresser.

"You cursed fool! The man's drunk. What the deuce do you mean by being such an ass." Then the comic side of the situation took him also, and he joined me in my merriment.

"By Jove," he chortled, "Segregation has done it this time."

There was no use attempting to awaken him for the moment, so the doctor turned on the dresser again. How had it come about? How had he allowed himself to be so imposed upon?

It was quite simple, even when clothed in the babu's best "middel-fail" English.

Segregation had come, had seen, had conquered. He had declared himself sick of the plague, and defied the dresser to deny it. He had thereupon taken possession of the dispensary, ordered the erection of the temporary sheds by enforced labour, cleared out the patients, used up all the disinfectants, and had then, but not till then, taken to his bed and drunk all the brandy! So "cometic symptoms supervening, and supplies of brandy exhausting," the dresser had appealed "through authentic sources for aid of the Almighty."

"Anyway, by Jove!" said the doctor, as he noted all the arrangements, "I couldn't have done it better myself. He has even"—he pointed to a row of men, evidently of the semi-savage Sansiya race, who were squatting in front of the village accountant's house—"set them to killing rats!"

And, in truth, each of these hardy hunters, bore a bamboo on which were strung the dead bodies of many rodents, young and old. Undoubtedly Job Charnock had a genius for organisation; and, with a mournful prescience of what would be the answer, I asked the nearest Sansi what he was to get for his rats.

It was half the Government rate: but the broad grin on the man's face showed him satisfied. Yes! Job Charnock had the gift of the Empire-builder!

"Look here!" I said to the doctor, "that man hasn't committed an indictable offence. He diagnosed his complaint as plague—that is not indictable; he went to your Department for advice and got confirmation of his suspicions; that was not his fault; and all he's done since then, is what *ought* to have been done under the circumstances."

"Except the brandy," expostulated the doctor. "Brandy is not in the dietary for plague, and he's drunk up the year's supply! That amounts to stealing."

"Pardon me! You can have the dresser up for misuse of supplies, if you like," I said stoutly, "but every drop of that brandy was drunk out of one of your blessed measuring glasses." I pointed to the inverted crystal cone with cabalistic signs on it which lay beside the bottle. "He

couldn't have taken more than an ounce at a time, and that to a man of his habits is strictly a medicinal dose, and for that your dresser is responsible. No! send him in to me when he sobers. I'll settle him up."

I did so to the best of my ability, but there was no question that Job Charnock *was*, as the doctor had said, "a bit looney" at times, especially when he had any drink on board, though no one could have called him a habitual drunkard. Still, there was little use in getting him employment. He always drifted out of it again. Then, for a while, he would disappear, only to return after a few months with his usual, "I don't want to do no 'arm to anyone. I wants to be seggergated, for I've got the plague, so 'elp me Gawd I 'ave." He was always, then, at the last point of destitution; more than once even the "*hart hanner*" for the *ticca ghari* was not his, and he would come skulking into the office almost starving and barefoot. For he looked on me as a friend in need; and, indeed, I used sometimes to wonder if hunger were not as much responsible for the recurrence of his delusion as drink.

Then I was transferred to Rajputana, and apparently left Job Charnock behind me, until one hot weather morning when, in order to catch a train, I was galloping across a short cut of the wild Bar land which lay between the railway and the out-of-the-way-place where I was stationed. It is a strange desert, this Bar land, of wild caper bushes, stunted *jund* trees, and hard resilient limestone soil, baked by the sun to whiteness. A horse's hoofs resounds over it for miles, but a man, if he left visible path, might, without the aid of the sun, lose his way in it almost any moment. Even I had to glance at the whereabouts of that luminary when a few moment's abstraction caused me to divert my eye from the faint traces of previous passages which was all there was of path.

As I did so, my eye was caught by something curious in the gnarled branches of a *jund* tree some fifty yards further away. It looked like a red cross. Instinctively I rode towards it. It *was* a red cross. Two strips of red Turkey cotton had been carefully tied crosswise between the branches. What did it mean? And why had that

shallow trench—a mere scraping on the hard soil—been traced between that tree and the next?

And—yes!—that was another red cross in its branches also! I rode on only to find that here again the trench trended at right angles towards a further tree where yet another red cross showed.

The grey, green, leafless triangle of caper bushes, all set with tiny coral bud-flowers, had so far prevented my seeing anything within the traced square; but now I came upon a definite opening. Across it, however, from bush to bush, stretched a pair of men's braces, and pinned to this was a bit of paper on which something was written in what looked suspiciously like blood.

I jumped off my horse and bent to look at it. Though written in large characters it was barely decipherable, and seemed to have been drawn with difficulty by a pointed stick. This much I could read:

"Trespussers will be persecuted
No Thoroughfare
Case of Plague within s'elp me Gawd."

Segregation! by all that was holy!

I tied my horse to the inarched root of a *jund* tree, set aside the braces, and made my way through the bushes.

It was quite a comfortable secluded spot. The grey-green set-with-scarlet brocade of the caper bushes formed a curtain round it, the floor of it was hard and white as marble; but in the middle of the little open space there was, as one sees so often in this Bar land, a tiny hillock of sand that had been whirled thither and left by the wild dust storms which sweep over the Rajputana desert. And on this sand Job Charnock lay, his face turned up to the sky. He cannot have been dead long, for his body was untouched by wild birds or beasts, but he was quite dead. Perhaps though, the sleeves of his turkey-red shirt—the rest of it having evidently gone to the making of crosses—which were hung on sticks set in the sand at his head and his feet might, so far, have frightened away the animals. They might have been put there for the purpose; on the

other hand they might have been meant as a last danger signal, not to prevent harm being done to him, but to prevent him from "'arming anybody." His bare body showed terribly emaciated; but his face was calm; it almost had a smile upon it.

Had he really died of the plague; or, in coming, it might be, to see me, had he lost his way, as a stranger might well do, in the pathless Bar, and fallen a victim to starvation? And had the recurrence of hunger brought on his curious hallucination once more?

Who could say? Plague was very prevalent. It might be one; it might be the other.

I stood looking at the peaceful face for a minute or two; then I made up my mind. He should have his wish; no one this time should interfere with his desire to "do no 'arm to nobody."

So, covering the body for the time with the doubled blanket I always use as a saddle cloth, I rode off to the nearest village, some six miles off, and returned with two men, pickaxes and shovels.

It took some time to dig a grave in that hard white soil; but when the coolies had done patting down the dry dust and limestone nodules into the long mound of earth which is the outward sign that a human body lies beneath, I lingered to peg one of the red crosses over it.

So he found Segregation at last. There was no more fear of his doing any harm to anyone.

SLAVE OF THE COURT

I sate in the sunshine of Delhi as it blazed down upon the trellised tombs of a dead dynasty. I was very tired; as police officers are apt to be when Crowned Heads travel in India. But my particular Monarch was away from my jurisdiction laying foundation stones elsewhere, so I had an off four-and-twenty hours. Not knowing Delhi as it should be known, I utilised my holiday for slow, solitary, silent sight-seeing, in the course of which I had driven out to the Kutb-minar, had bidden the carriage return to await me by Humayon's Tomb, so, with lunch in my pocket, had set out systematically to reconstruct old India out of the crowding ruins.

It is a fascinating occupation; but one provocative of dreams, and, as I rested, idly smoking, in the shade of a gnarled *jhund* tree, I was more than half asleep. Around me lay the graves of Kings who had once ruled in the flesh. I had been trying, as it were, to live their lives, to see with their eyes, and the conclusion had been forced in upon me that though the monarchy had changed (and my particular Crowned Head was certainly not to pattern of the Old Indian autocrat) the country and the people had altered but little.

For instance, the pageant through the city streets of a few days past, with the brazen sunlight setting silks and satins aflame with vivid colours, and painting every shadow dark with the purple gloom of night, was, as it were, of all time; the faces of the crowd through which it cleft its way, were in type, in character, permanent.

I closed my eyes to visualize how the dapper Viceroy would have looked had he been scattering golden pistachios, silver almonds and enamelled rose leaves amongst the lieges, instead of sitting his horse purposefully, like an ill-fitting statue and inwardly rehearsing the detail of up-to-date benefits he had to proclaim at the end

of his ride? Were they, I wondered, more satisfactory than the older largesse?

When I opened my eyes, I saw a naked old man squatted forlornly among the latticed graves. He held a flat basket —a gardener's basket—between his knees; it contained only one compact posy of closely crushed flowers—the *gul* this and *gul* that—beloved of natives; but I saw that a similar bunch had been laid on several of the tombs.

The man, however, was palpably *not* a gardener. No one of Indian experience who on real hot-weather evenings had wandered round his back premises could have hesitated as to vocation. Either as *chef* or scullion, the figure belonged to the cook-room; there was that in its very nakedness (save for a tight-wound waist cloth), that in the very polish of the close-shaved head, which was quaintly reminiscent of full-starched raiment and high-piled turban.

Now, I always speak to a native when I get him alone—it is a useful habit for a police officer—so I said casually:

"On what tomb, friend, are you going to put that bunch?"

The old figure turned, profuse—of course!—in *salaam*; it showed a wrinkled toothless face, overlaid with the smiles and subtlety of centuries of service. But its reply was dazed, forlorn.

"This slave of the Court," it mumbled, "seeks for a tomb that was but is not. God send some miscreant hath not taken the marble slab thereof for his idolatrous curry-stone! Lo! I can find it nowhere, and the inscription thereof is lost—is lost!"

A world of angry apprehension crept into the tired blear old eyes; the tired old hand shook visibly.

"What inscription?" I asked idly.

"My inscription, Protector of the Poor!" came the tired old voice. "Yea! whatever this slave of the Court said, the writer Abd-un-Nubbi copied it."

I sate up more alert, vaguely reminiscent of something I had seen lately. "What was it about?" I queried; this time curiously.

"About the Heaven-Nestled Kings the slave of the

Court served," came the reply, less wearily; and, as if some stored memory cylinder had been set going by key-words, the voice went on, gaining strength: "This old slave of the Court does not feel any shame in serving the Kings and the Nobles! This old slave of the Court, Mahmud, supplicates God that the name of the Heaven-Nestled Emperor Humayon and the Heaven-Nestled Emperor Akbar may be perpetuated for all time! Lo! may they have been given the robe of Paradise! This old slave of the Court honoured by the Earth-Cherished Emperor Jahangir was told, 'You have grown old. Serve in the tomb of the Heaven-Nestled One at Delhi.'

"Humbly says Mahmud, old slave of the Court! He has come nigh to ninety years, he has come nigh his end. He has passed his life in luxury and ease through the kindness of Kings. Oh! Mahmud! no desire is left unfulfilled. Of giving and taking, buying and selling, bargainings in the bazaar, all is done with now!

"Lo! in this seat of Delhi, the rulers and the land-holders, the elders and the neighbours should entrust this tomb and shrine (of which the total amount of expenses, including all necessary articles and allowances was 290,000 tankas) to those who are my heirs and who deserve to possess it, as it was built with my honestly-earned money." The long-drawn-out quaintly ungrammatical Persian phrases ceased in a melancholy refrain: "But it has gone, Huzoor! Someone has taken away my tomb-stone."

I knew now what he was talking about; knew why that faint message of memory had come to me. I had seen this inscription, or something like it, in the Delhi Museum, on a square slab of white marble which the catalogue said had been found amongst some ruins not far from where we were sitting.

I looked at the old man; though he himself was well on in years, the impossibility of his words made me pass over major points to cavil at minor ones.

"My tombstone!" I echoed. "I suppose you mean this King's cook was a forbear of yours. You come of a servant family, I expect, ah! Prince of Personalities."

I gave him the full title of the highest domestic office with intent. It had a marvellous effect. His bowed back straightened itself; he seemed to sit resplendent in gold-laced coat and badge-wound turban. "The Huzoor speaks truth," he said, with perfectly blatant dignity. "Since the beginning of time my people have served Kings—and Sahibs."

The last was a palpable concession to the alien, and I could not help smiling. But the old man, despite his toothless, wrinkled, wagging head, was no subject for smiles. He sate there transfigured, his face shiny, an apotheosis of what folk nowadays call servility. You felt it in the warm scented sunshine; an atmosphere of dutiful devotion that brought a kindly interest to my heart.

"It hasn't been taken as a curry-stone," I said gravely: "it is quite safe. I saw it yesterday in the Wonder House." And then I remembered that my Crowned Head had paused over it to look and smile. "Yes! Prince of Personalities," I went on, "there it is. A marble slab with an inscription." So I went on to tell him what had occurred.

He sate and listened, gravely, reverently, and when I had finished he rose—I knew he would—and salaamed down to the ground.

"This poor Preparer-of-Plates is proud still to serve Majesty. May the Earth cherish the Wise King long! May Heaven nestle him when the time comes for soul to separate from body."

As I looked into the blazing sunshine at the old, naked, bald-headed figure, I swear it seemed to me clothed upon with all the liveries of all those centuries of service.

"Lo!" he went on, "let the tombstone remain in the Wonder House where it hath been honoured by the eye-glances of Kings. And as for the Noble Huzoor who hath relieved this poor slave of the Court's mind concerning curry-stones——" he paused, took up the remaining posy from his basket and held it out to me between deferential palms. "It is all I have, Huzoor, but it is sweet," he said simply, "and I have asked so many before, and none could tell me."

In sudden impulse I took it. "I'll tell you what I'll

do, Prince of Personalities!" I said, half in jest, "I'll stop at the Wonder House on my way home and put it on the tombstone. Will that satisfy you?"

Once again he salaamed to the ground. "The gratitude of this old slave of the Court will go with the Huzoor all his days."

I left him salaaming still among the graves. As I drove back I regretted not having lingered to pick his brains concerning those centuries of his ancestors' service. Good stories must have been handed down as heirlooms; one curious as I was of the past might have heard much of interest.

But holiday was over. My Crowned Head had returned, making me responsible. In addition, fate was unkind. My major-domo, on whose care during those strenuous days when meals were oft-deferred. I was entirely dependent, fell sick and had to go to hospital. Not, however, before he had, in kindly Indian fashion, found me a substitute. Everyone who has been in India knows the type of professional cook-room substitute. They are to be seen sometimes in old dâk bungalows, survivals still of the patronage of other days when such posts were the recognised superannuation pensions for civilians' servants. And this substitute of mine—I call them scapegoats as a rule, since all the subsequent sins of omission or commission in the back purlieus are invariably laid to their charge—differed in no way from the type. He was rather more aggressive in starch than most. He had the biggest of white turbans, and the forward bow of his arched back was a little more accentuated than usual by folds on folds of white bandaging until he looked as if he were wearing an extra sized, new whited motor tyre round his waist. But his scanty beard was purple black, and his eyes were brightened to youth with beautiful rims of antimony. Altogether he looked his part to perfection; and for a wonder, performed it also.

My table servant admitted at once that he was a "master artificer," and I, personally, confessed that never had I had such appetising dinners. Most of these substitutes have old-world dishes at their fingers' ends;

dishes with strange names which philology can trace back to French and Portuguese origin, but this old man might have come from a Parisian restaurant.

"This slave belongs to a family of cooks," he said calmly, when I questioned him as to where he had learnt to make "*Petits Timbales de foie gras à la Belle Eugénie.*" "Therefore the wisdom of all the ages is at his disposal. When a slave's mind is set on serving his master, nothing is impossible."

And nothing seemed to be. My Inspector-General was a gourmet. He breakfasted with me in camp one morning, and after that it is surprising how often his meal times tallied with mine. So, in the course of a few days, the fame of my cook became noised abroad; especially when the Crowned Head started on a shooting tour and had to leave his French chef behind him; the latter not feeling equal to camp fires.

Then the Substitute came to the fore, and once or twice when I had the honour of dining at the Royal table, I noticed dishes which I could have sworn my man had prepared. Knowing the curious bond of brotherhood which exists in India between one cook-room and another, I knew this was quite possible.

We had some hard marching, and at the end of a week, I noticed that my substitute was palpably older. The *surma* had worn off his eyes; there was a fringe of grey beard above the purple black; yet still he looked magnificently starched as he stood behind my chair on the frequent occasions when the suite messed with royalty. Then we arrived at a Hill Rajah-ship where there had been some trouble during a long minority between Palace-Women and a Council of Regency; neither being over-satisfied with the Resident. But our Royal visit was to inaugurate a new regime under a new young Rajah, and great were to be the rejoicings; amongst other things a State Dinner in the Palace.

We were a bit late coming in from a shoot after black partridge, and I had a good many preparations to make, as I was in police charge, so that it was almost dark ere I returned to my tent to dress for dinner. To my surprise

I found the Substitute immaculate one inside. He was immaculate as ever, but he looked old and frail and worn. Still it needed one of those sudden enlargements of personality, which are so puzzling, to make the shadows of the tent bring what the light of day had denied to me—recognition of the old man I had met amongst the latticed Tombs of Kings—the man who had lost his tombstone.

"You old scoundrel," I said. "Why didn't you tell me before who you were."

He salaamed a trifle furtively as he replied, "It is nothing to the master who his servant is, so that the servant be faithful, and I am that. My gratitude is bound to the Huzoor for ever and ever. So I came to ask what Tasters have been appointed for the Earth-Cherished-One this evening."

"Tasters?" I echoed. "What the deuce do you mean? Tasters!" Then it flashed upon me that he was alluding to the old "Tasters for Poison"; and I looked at him curiously. In the semi-darkness he seemed to have shrunken, to be inconceivably old and frail, so I went on more kindly. "There's no need for them nowadays, old man. They belong to the past. The King—God bless him!—is safe from that sort of thing. Thank Heaven."

I was throwing off my shooting togs vigorously, and the answer came out of the corner of the tent, as it were, vaguely.

"So said Firdoos Makâni, the Sainted Babar in Paradise, yet he had to live a full month on lily leaves, and the Heaven-Nestled One the Emperor Humayon was also—"

"Look here! old chap!" I said, divided between haste and the desire to tap these old stories. "You shall tell me all that to-morrow. At present I must be off to the Palace to see all is right." Then I laughed. "Other days other manners. Ah! descendant of Mahmud the King's Cook! we have to look after bombs, not poisons, nowadays."

The answer came faintly to me, "The wickedness of men's hearts is ever the same, Huzoor!"

I do not think I ever saw a prettier entertainment. The

long-eyed lazy-looking young Rajah must have had the blood of past sybarites in his veins, for he had enhanced Oriental splendour with Western refinement to perfection.

Having seen by a glance that all my detectives were in their places, knowing also the infinite precautions which had been secretly taken on all sides, and feeling fairly secure of the young ruler's personal loyalty, I felt I might enjoy myself, and I did. The champagne was iced to perfection, the illuminations glimmered softly away into the gloom of the lake, a band of native musicians, beautifully trained, discoursed plaintive love songs on native instruments deftly entuned to almost Western modulations, the dinner was super-excellent, a combination of Eastern and Western delicacies, and there was not one single hitch in the arrangements, except for a slight *contretemps*, due, apparently, to short-sightedness on the part of my venerable Scapegoat. He collided with the State servant who was handing a special tray of curried *koftahs* to the Crowned Head, with the result that the Crowned Head did not even get a taste of it. But the accident only raised a moment's laugh. The debris was cleared away in a twinkling, and I caught sight of the offender's scared protesting face as he was hustled away from further mischief.

After dinner we had a really excellent pantomime in dumb show by native actors, so it was past midnight ere I returned to my tent. I found my Chief Inspector, a man I could really trust, a man whose wide experience was of infinite use to me, standing outside.

"A report, Huzoor!" he said briefly, and I passed into the office. He looked all round, carefully closed the screens, and then began in a low voice:

"Huzoor! When your Honour's servant upset the State servant and his dish, I was close by. There was a look on your Honour's servant's face I did not understand. They scrambled instantly for the *koftahs*—scrambled hastily —to pick them up. But I got *one*, Huzoor. I gave it to a dog; and Huzoor! the dog is dead!"

I could scarcely speak. "Dead! ye Gods!" Then I

remembered that the dog would be needful evidence, and said at once, "Where is the body? Bring it here."

But, if there had been a conspiracy to poison, the conspirators had been too quick for us. The *corpus delicti* was not where it had been left. Neither was the Substitute to be found. The other servants reported that, overcome with shame at his unpardonable offence in depriving an Earth-Cherished-One of his victuals, he had retired into the wilderness. Whence he never returned.

My Inspector-General used to bewail the *Petits Timbales de foie gras à la Belle Eugénie.* But *I* have never ceased to wonder. And every time I go to Delhi I go to the Wonder House and lay a posy on the tombstone of Mahmud, the old Slave of the Court.

The gratitude was to be for ever and ever; so there is time for more yet.

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